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SILK ROAD STUDIES XIV



Craig G.R. Benjamin

THE YUEZHI

*Origin, Migration and the
Conquest of Northern Bactria*

BREPOLS

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Synopsis

This book attempts to provide a detailed narrative history of the dynasty and confederation of the Yuezhi, whose migration from western China to the northern border of present-day Afghanistan resulted ultimately in the creation of the Kushan Empire. Although the Yuezhi have long been recognised as the probable ancestors of the Kushans, they have generally only been considered as a prelude to the principal subject of Kushan history, rather than as a significant and influential 'people' in their own right. This has partly been because the evidence for them seems so limited and ambiguous, depending in the main on almost incidental references in three ancient Chinese texts, Greek classical histories (which survive in fragments only) and the very tentative conclusions of archaeologists.

None the less, it is the contention of this book that the evidence is actually surprisingly extensive and detailed, and is certainly sufficient for the compilation of a comprehensive chronological political history of the Yuezhi during the first millennium BCE. This study analyses most of the evidence currently available – textual, archaeological and numismatic – in an attempt to explain the probable origin of the Yuezhi; their relationship with several Chinese dynasties; their eventual military defeat and expulsion from the Gansu by the Xiongnu; their migration through the Ili Valley, Ferghana and Sogdia to northern Bactria; and their role in the conquest of the former Greco-Bactria state.

All of these events were bound up with broader cultural and political developments in ancient Central Asia, and if nothing else, this book hopes to show the extraordinary interconnectedness of Eurasian historical processes. The Yuezhi were well known to a range of contiguous peoples (generally by variants of the appellation 'Tocharian') and the events in which they found themselves involved, particularly during the second century BCE, were to have a profound effect on the subsequent political, military and cultural development of much of Inner Asia. In particular the 'domino-effect' of their migration led to significant changes in the broader Eurasian polity, affecting as it did the Chinese, Xiongnu, Wusun, Sakas, Ferghanese, Sogdians and Bactrian Greeks. These events and their consequences are all explored in some detail within the body of this book.

Chapter One seeks the probable ancestors of the Yuezhi – the proto-Yuezhi – within the broader context of Bronze Age pastoral nomadic migrations, before considering early textual (Chinese, Indian, Greek) and archaeological evidence which suggests that the Yuezhi may have established a powerful and successful federation in present-day Xinjiang and the Gansu, based on trade in jade and horses. Chapter Two looks at events in the Gansu between 220 and 162 BCE, when the rise of the Xiongnu federation under *Shanyu* Maodun resulted in the defeat and expulsion of the Yuezhi. Chapter Three describes the first stage of their enforced migration to the Ili Valley, and includes a discussion of the probable fate of the Saka residents of the Ili who were in turn forced to undertake their own substantial migration to the south, perhaps as far as Kashmir. Chapter Four examines textual and archaeological evidence for the second stage of Yuezhi migration through the Ferghana and Zeravshan Valleys. Finally, Chapter Five considers the question of the disintegration of the Greco-

Bactrian state, as well as the establishment of the Yuezhi in a strong and comfortable position north of the Amu Darya by c. 125 BCE, when this particular study concludes.

Outside of the scope of this book are the events that followed, including the crossing of the Amu Darya and settlement in Bactria proper (present-day Afghanistan) by the Yuezhi in five tribal 'yabghu' divisions. Eventually, by the mid-first century CE, the ruler of one of those yabghu – Kujula Kadphises of the Kueizhuang – went on to reunite the Yuezhi under Kueizhuang leadership and establish the Kushan Empire. It is my hope to explore the five-yabghu period and the rise of the early Kushans in a separate study in the future. In the meantime, this book hopes to introduce the Yuezhi to the wider community of historians, and to demonstrate yet again the fundamental importance of Central Asian political and cultural processes to Eurasian and world history.

Acknowledgments

In the course of writing and researching this study I have benefited enormously from the advice, support and kindness of many people. Foremost amongst these is Professor David Christian, formerly of Macquarie University and now at San Diego State University. My debt to David is substantial. It was he who first introduced me to the Kushans, and who has given me nothing but encouragement and support in my endeavours ever since. Through my connection with David I became Secretary of the Australasian Society for Inner Asian Studies (A.S.I.A.S.), which has been responsible for staging several major conferences on Inner Asian history and culture at Macquarie. David and I have co-edited two books of papers from the conferences, which have been published by Brepols as part of this Silk Roads Studies series. A third volume was prepared for the same series by Sam Lieu and myself, and was published late in 2002. David carefully read this manuscript and made numerous incisive and telling comments that have greatly improved the final product.

Secondly, I would like to thank my father, Gordon Benjamin, who before his retirement spent his working life as a senior journalist and editor. Gordon has made an invaluable contribution to the book, casting his seasoned editor's eye over all 100,000 words.

Thirdly, I must thank Professor Sam Lieu, Professor of Ancient History at Macquarie University, for his encouragement and advice. Ever since Sam took up his appointment, research into Central Asian history and culture has been strongly supported at that institution. Sam has not only read the entire book and made numerous important suggestions, but has also been personally responsible for introducing me to a number of distinguished specialists in various ancient Central Asian fields, including Joe Cribb, Dr. David MacDowall, Dr. Nicholas Sims-Williams, Professor Alois van Tongerloo, Dr. David Bivar and Dr. Elizabeth Errington. I have benefited enormously through these contacts, and would like to thank Sam and each of the individuals named above for their courtesy, expertise and interest in my work. In addition, my many friends and fellow Central Asian historians in A.S.I.A.S. (of which Sam is Honorary President) have given me much appreciated encouragement in my research.

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I was fortunate enough to spend time in London in 1999, 2000 and 2001, partly as a result of financial assistance provided by the Research Office at Macquarie

University, for which I am grateful. Most of that time was spent working in the Department of Coins at the British Museum, and I must particularly thank Joe Cribb, Elizabeth Errington and all the staff for their hospitality and expertise. In addition a visit to the Royal Asiatic Society was fruitful, and I very much appreciate the assistance I received there. Dr. David MacDowall was also most generous with his time, and I benefited greatly from meeting with him in London. I was further honoured by an invitation to deliver a lecture at SOAS for the Circle of Inner Asian Art, and I would like to thank everyone in that important organisation, particularly Professor Rodenick Whitfield and Madhuvanti Ghose, for their encouragement of my research. In addition, Joe Cribb, David MacDowall, Nicholas Sims-Williams and Elizabeth Errington were all kind enough to supply me with copies of a substantial number of papers they had written, which added significantly to the resources I had at my disposal when writing the book. More recently I spent time in Paris working with the Greco-Bactria coin collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and must express my considerable thanks to Dr. Osmund Bopearachchi for his invaluable personal assistance and advice. I must also express my gratitude and respect to Professor A.K. Narain, one of the world's leading specialists in the field of Yuezhi/Tocharian studies, who took a personal interest in my research, and was kind enough to send me copies of many of his papers and monographs.

To my family I owe an enormous debt, particularly my parents who instilled in me from an early age a love of reading and academic research, but also of travel and adventure. I must also acknowledge the life-long support I have received from my wider family – my brother Drew and sister Kymelle and their families, my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. I must finally express my heartfelt gratitude to my dear children Zoe and Asher, both of whom have excelled in their own academic fields and in their wider lives, and of whom I am very proud, and my wife Pamela, who has been my constant companion and inspiration during both the research and writing of this book, and also my life for the past thirty years.

Preface

This book is a product of my interest in the history of ancient Central Asia in particular, and world history in general. For most of my undergraduate years at Macquarie University I concentrated on Roman history, but eventually became more interested in contacts between the Mediterranean and Asian worlds, and the astonishing levels of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange that occurred along the Silk Roads for millennia. These exchanges were made possible by the fact that just four great powers – the Han, Parthians, Romans and Kushans – controlled a vast area of Eurasia, from the China Sea to Britain, and from the Russian steppes to India. The stability engendered by these powerful and long-ruling dynasties resulted in ideal conditions which, along with developments in metallurgy, coinage, roads and transportation, created a unique environment that facilitated these hitherto unprecedented levels of cultural interaction. And it was not just the four major civilisations that engaged in these exchanges, but pastoral nomads, horticulturalists and hunter-gatherers as well.

As I began to research these exchanges it soon became apparent that it was the Kushan Empire that had been at the heart of this great network, straddling and dominating both the land and sea routes at the very 'Crossroads of Asia'. The Kushans managed to maintain relatively cordial relations with all their neighbours, and had thus been in a position to greatly facilitate Silk Roads mercantile and cultural exchange. Indeed, so important were the Kushans to Silk Roads trade that the period between c. 50 BCE and c. 200 CE might quite justifiably be called the 'Kushan Era', and should be recognized as one of the most important and influential periods in world history. Their empire included all of present-day Tajikistan, most of Uzbekistan, parts of Kyrgyzstan, southern Turkmenistan, parts of western Xinjiang (briefly), the whole of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and much of northern and central India.

Through their geographical domination of Inner Asia, the Kushan monarchs grew wealthy by acting as middle-men in the great volume of trade that passed through their extensive territories. They also adopted a broad-minded and tolerant attitude towards the variety of religions practised throughout their multi-cultural empire, facilitating the diffusion of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and, in particular, Buddhism. The great art workshops of Gandhara and Mathura were responsible for the first ever representations of the Buddha, and the syncretic sculptures produced there were an important influence upon the subsequent development of Asian art.

But why are the Kushans, given their central and fundamental importance in the diffusion of Eurasian culture, so little known? Why must they be counted as one of the great 'lost-civilisations' of the ancient world? The answer, of course, is that the evidence for them is so problematic. They left no extant body of literature, and only relatively few of their fragmentary inscriptions are known. Yet the ancestors of the Kushans, the Yuezhi or Tocharians, are mentioned in the literature of several contiguous peoples – Han, Indian, Tibetan, and Greco-Roman – and it is from this often incidental evidence that much of their history has been constructed. In addition, only relatively few examples of Kushan monumental architecture have survived, although seventh century Chinese pilgrims attested to their construction of impressive palaces, stupas and dynastic sanctuaries.

The difficult environmental and political access problems that have existed in Central Asia for centuries have further hampered archaeological research, although Russian and Central Asian archaeologists have developed an extensive knowledge of Yuezhi and Kushan activity north of the Amu Darya, while the British and French made some extraordinary Kushan finds in Afghanistan over several decades. More recently, Chinese, Central Asian and Australian archaeologists have also been making important advances in our knowledge of the period.

The most substantial and significant evidence for the Kushans is numismatic. Kushan coins have been discovered in their thousands throughout the extent of their territory. They provide evidence of early cultural influences upon the embryonic empire, of Kushan military and political expansion, of the genealogy of royal succession, of Kushan religious and ideological beliefs, of their economic domination of Central Asia for almost three centuries, and of the eventual dissolution and incorporation of Kushan territory into the Iranian polity of the Sasanians, and the Indian cultural resurgence that occurred under the Guptas.

The Kushans were descended from a dynasty and federation called the Yuezhi by the Chinese, and the Tocharians (or variations thereof) by other contiguous peoples, because they probably spoke the Indo-European *centum* branch language of Tocharian. The origins of the Yuezhi are obscure, but must be sought amongst the pastoral nomads of the Bronze Age who migrated out from their original south Russian homeland and settled at various locations across Inner Asia. Eventually, as Chapter One attempts to show, one such group found itself securely established in the Gansu (Hexi) Corridor of western China. Here they established a substantial federation of semi-nomadic and agricultural peoples, and grew wealthy and powerful perhaps by trading jade and horses with the Chinese Zhou Dynasty. In the second century BCE, however, their supremacy was undermined by the Xiongnu who, under their powerful leader Maodun and his successors, eventually defeated the Yuezhi and forced them to migrate out of the Gansu.

The western migration of the Yuezhi was to prove one of the most significant events in the history of ancient Central Asia. Because of the domino-effect of Eurasian migrations, they displaced various Saka (or Scythian) groups already settled along their route, and those migrations in turn had a critical effect on the wider stage of Inner Asian geopolitical history. Thirty years later the Yuezhi settled in the fertile river valleys north of the Amu Darya, in present-day Uzbekistan. They quickly established dominance over the region and, as noted above, subsequently went on to occupy present-day Afghanistan in 'tribal' yabghu divisions until, in c. 45 BCE, they were reunited by Kujula Kadphises of the Kueizhuang yabghu, the first king of the Kushans.

Only the early part of this history is related in this book, which considers as much of the available evidence for the Yuezhi as possible, and synthesizes it into some sort of narrative. Although possessing a reasonable linguistic proficiency, I can make no claim to be a specialist in the languages of ancient Central Asia, and have used first-class translations throughout. Furthermore, although having an extensive knowledge of Central Asian archaeology and numismatics, neither am I a recognized specialist in those fields. As a professional historian, what I have attempted to do in this book is draw upon the knowledge obtained by a great number of distinguished academics in

those three often isolated disciplines and apply my own independent and critical analysis to it. The end product is thus undoubtedly something of a synthesis, but it also provides the most detailed, coherent, chronological narrative history of the Yuezhi so far produced, from their probable origins as Bronze Age pastoral nomads to their eventual status as masters of Bactria

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Chapter One

The Origin of the Yuezhi

Introduction

In the history of a dynasty about which so much is uncertain, the origin of the Yuezhi remains arguably the most obscure subject of all. After more than a century of scholarship, even the most fundamental assumptions are still regarded as having only a tenuous link to the fragmentary evidence, which itself is open to wide interpretation. The Yuezhi are considered to have been of Indo-European origin because linguistic evidence suggests that they probably spoke the Indo-European *centum* branch language of Tocharian, examples of which have been discovered at various Tarim Basin oasis sites since early in the twentieth century. This raises the problem of how Indo-European *centum* speakers found themselves wedged far to the east between Palaeo-Siberian¹ and Chinese-speaking groups on one side, and Indo-Iranian *satem* speakers on the other. This has led to suggestions that the Yuezhi (and indeed the Indo-Europeans in general) might actually have been autochthonous to eastern Central Asia,² although the consensus view would still hold that they must have migrated into the region from the north and west at some time in the past.

However, any attempt to argue this more likely scenario demands that several questions first be addressed. These include the location of the original homeland of the Yuezhi; the date, cause and route of their migration to the east; the location and length of their occupation of some interim residency; and the date of their arrival in their ultimate homeland, the Gansu and Tarim Basin. Finding answers to these questions necessitates an analysis of a range of evidence – ethnographic, archaeological, linguistic and textual – in the hope of determining the most likely historical scenario. Although this evidence might at first appear impossibly circumstantial, speculative and ambiguous, such a detailed analysis is the only course available. And, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, when the evidence is examined in detail a reasonably coherent course of events does seem to emerge.

This book will argue that the ancestors of the Yuezhi were Indo-European-speaking pastoral nomads who migrated out from the original southern Russian homeland of all Indo-Europeans in the middle of the 3rd Millennium BCE, part of the second of three

¹ The languages spoken by the most significant 'barbarian' tribes along China's northern borders are regarded by some as having been Turkish or Mongolian variants, as will be considered below. Both Ligeti and Pulleyblank disputed this however, and claim that there is more evidence to identify the Xiongnu in particular as Palaeo-Siberian speakers. See L. Ligeti, 'Mots de civilisation de Haute Asie en transcription Chinoise', *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 1 (1950) pp. 141-188, I. G. Pulleyblank, 'The Consonantal System of Old Chinese', in *Asia Major* 9 (1962) pp. 58-144, 206-265, I. G. Pulleyblank, 'The Chinese and their Neighbours in Prehistoric and early Historic Times', in D.N. Keightley, ed., *The Origins of Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1983) p. 451.

² A detailed consideration of this suggestion will be offered below, but see for example A.K. Naram, *The Tocharians* (Shillong 2000) pp. 9-16.

great waves of Indo-European migration that delineate the Bronze Age history of Eurasia. Possibly to be identified as part of the 'Afanasevo' culture of Russian ethno-archaeology, the ancestors of the Yuezhi (proto-Yuezhi) may have settled somewhere in northeastern Inner Asia for up to half a millennium. Then, in the Late Bronze Age, another wave of Indo-European invasions, this time by people speaking an Indo-Iranian *satem* branch dialect, seems to have coincided with (or been responsible for) a further movement to the south by elements of the proto-Yuezhi (Afanasievo?) culture, who then resettled in the Gansu region near Dunhuang and further west across the northern Tarim Basin, some time early in the second millennium BCE.

And there they may have dwelt for almost two millennia, an isolated outpost of *satem*-speaking Indo-Europeans wedged in between the Mongoloid steppe nomads and Chinese to the east and the Indo-Iranian *satem*-speakers to the west. They established a powerful and wealthy semi-sedentised pastoralist state, perhaps based on the import of jade to Zhou Dynasty China, and were able to treat their neighbours, including the Wusun and proto-Xiongnu, with contempt because of their apparent military superiority and wealth. This remained the situation until 162 BCE when a resurgent Xiongnu finally achieved a level of military superiority sufficient to defeat the Yuezhi and force them once again to migrate, this time back towards the west – events described in the Han Dynastic annals that shall be considered in subsequent chapters. The aim of this opening chapter is to analyse the available evidence for the origins of the Yuezhi, beginning with an overview of the general ethno-archaeological evidence of nomadic migrations and invasions from the fourth to first millennia BCE, before turning to a more detailed consideration of linguistic, archaeological and textual evidence, in an attempt to establish the most likely course of events.

I

Archaeological Evidence of Bronze Age Nomadic Migrations

The Origins of Pastoral Nomadism

The history of Eurasia from the late Neolithic Period until comparatively recently has been characterised by the continuous interaction between sedentary agrarian and nomadic pastoralist communities. This exchange occurred as a natural corollary of the appearance of agricultural technologies as an alternative to hunter-gathering in South West Asia from c. 11,000 BP. A range of at least three alternative lifeways subsequently emerged over the following millennia. Certain communities embraced agrarian technologies and became solely dependent on agricultural produce for their livelihood (i.e. became trapped into and by sedentism). Others remained nomadic hunter-gatherers by migrating into areas outside of the sedentary zones, often following conflict over resources with the agriculturalists. And yet others adopted elements of both lifeways, opting for a semi-sedentary, semi-nomadic existence. This latter alternative might generally describe the choice made by pastoralists or steppe nomads, and thus the foundations of steppe-nomadism are rooted in specific adaptive choices made by groups within the broad framework of early Holocene hunter-

gathering ecologies. Their emergence was the result of both evolutionary inevitability, but also of specific economic choice.

Pastoral nomads were destined to play a major role in the history of Central Asia. Pastoralists have been defined by Krader as 'those who are dependent chiefly on their herds of domestic stock for subsistence'.¹ Andrew Sherratt has argued that pastoralism was only able to emerge as a viable lifeway from early in the fifth millennium following the appearance of a package of technological changes associated with the utilisation of animal products, which Sherratt has dubbed the 'secondary products revolution'.² Whilst sheep, goats and cattle had all been domesticated from at least 6000 BCE, it was only when humans had learned to exploit the traction power of animals, as well as their 'secondary' products (including blood, milk and hair) that Neolithic peoples were able to extend their range by colonising large areas of grassland otherwise unsuitable for sedentary agriculture. It is surely no accident that extensive colonisation of the Inner Eurasian steppes only began after the 'discovery' of these innovative new technologies from c. 4000 BCE.³

The impact of migrating pastoralists upon the Eurasian landscape was immediate and profound. David Christian has summarised three general features that explain their impact – mobility, military virtuosity and their capacity for rapid mobilization.⁴ Despite their obvious mobility, however, pastoralists were not necessarily exclusively nomadic. The Soviet ethnographer S.A. Pletneva has proposed a basic model of three phases of mobilisation, ranging from large-scale continuous migration to sedentism. Between these extremes there were often stable periods of semi-nomadism.⁵ Recent research suggests that small semi-sedentary agricultural communities probably existed within most pastoralist communities of the Inner Eurasian steppes from at least the fourth millennium BCE.⁶ Furthermore, a distinct periodicity in cycles of semi-sedentism and nomadism seems to emerge from the same period, possibly influenced by climatic and demographic variables. In periods of warmer and wetter weather, agriculture may have become a more viable alternative in regions once suited only to nomadism, and in time large sedentary communities or even towns developed around the winter camps of regional leaders, as rooms added on to tents converted them into

¹ See for example M. Tosi, 'Theoretical Considerations on the Origin of Pastoral Nomadism', in G. Seaman, ed., *Foundations of Empire. Archaeology and Art of the Eurasian Steppes* (Los Angeles 1992) p. 27.

² I. Krader, 'The ecology of nomadic pastoralism', *International Social Science Journal*, vol. XI (1959) p. 499.

³ A. Sherratt, 'Plough and pastoralism: aspects of the secondary products revolution', in I. Hodder, G. Isaac and N. Hammond, eds., *Patterns of the Past* (Cambridge 1981), pp. 261-305.

⁴ It should be noted that Khazanov (according to fairly narrow criteria) dates the emergence of true nomadic pastoralism to as late as the first millennium BCE, although he does concede that there is substantial evidence of large-scale migrations by mobile pastoralists as early as the third millennium, in A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 2nd edn. (Madison 1994) pp. 92-4. However evidence of early horse riding from the eastern Ukraine and northern Kazakhstan does suggest that mobile pastoralists were active perhaps as early as c. 4000 BCE. See D.W. Anthony and D.R. Brown, 'The Origins of Horseback Riding', *Antiquity* (1991) 65 (246) pp. 22-3, 45-7.

⁵ David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia* vol. 1 (Oxford 1998) p. 86.

⁶ S.A. Pletneva, *Kochevniki srednevekov'ya. poiski istoricheskikh zakonomernostei* (Moscow 1982)

See summary p. 145

⁷ See for example R.J. Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology* (Cambridge 1991) p. 18, Khazanov, *op. cit.* pp. 69-84, Nicola di Cosmo, 'Ancient Inner Asian Nomads: Their Economic Basis and its Significance in Chinese History', *Journal of Asian Studies* (1994) 53(4) p. 113-4.

houses.¹⁰ However, once conditions changed and became less favourable to agrarian-based sedentism, the pastoralists once again began to not only nomadise but often to migrate vast distances across Inner Asia. Archaeological evidence clearly indicates periods of considerable disruption in the steppes from at least the middle of the 4th Millennium, which can most logically be explained by their correspondence with the migration of pastoral nomads through the region.¹¹ Climatic variation has been proposed by Dolukhanov (amongst others) as a possible catalyst for these periods of increased migration, and certainly a comparison between fluctuations in temperature and rainfall in the steppes and archaeological evidence of invasions by pastoral nomads does demonstrate an apparent degree of correspondence.¹² This might also tentatively indicate three periods apparently characterised by waves of migration (c. 3400-3200 BCE, c. 2600-2400 BCE, and c. 2000-1800 BCE)¹³ representing the invasion of Inner Asia by various groups of Indo-European *centum* and Indo-Iranian *satem* speaking pastoral nomads. It must be noted, however, that these dates for nomadic migration differ by more than two and sometime three centuries from the dates given to similar waves of emigration eastwards identified by Russian archaeologists, as will be considered below. Given the difficulties of precise artifact dating and the still tentative nature of evidence concerning the correspondence between nomadic disruption and weather cycles, it is hardly surprising (although still troubling) that there should exist some sort of disagreement between 'Western' and 'Russian' archaeologists working in this field. What is not disproven by any disagreement over dates, however, is the central contention of this chapter that somewhere amongst these groups of invaders the ancestors of the Yuezhi dynasty might potentially be located.

Sedentary Populations of the Fourth – First Millennia

Whether the first wave of migration is dated to the mid or late – fourth millennium BCE, the early pastoral nomads did not move into unoccupied or empty territory. Frye suggests that prior to the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, Central Asia was occupied by a number of disparate indigenous peoples, speaking languages related to Burushaski, Dravidian, Mannean or Urartian and living in small semi-sedentary settlements.¹⁴ Most of these indigenous inhabitants probably followed hunter-gatherer lifeways, as well as limited subsistence agriculture, and their numbers must have been sparse. Until discoveries made in the latter part of the twentieth century there was little evidence of the emergence of substantial populations or large towns or cities in ancient Central Asia, similar to those of Mesopotamia or the Indus Valley, before the first millennium BCE.¹⁵ However, more recently evidence of an

¹⁰ Crabb *ibid.* p. 161; D. Christian, 'State Formation in the Inner Eurasian Steppes', in D. Christian and C. Benjamin, eds., *Worlds of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern* (Turnhout 1998a) pp. 66-8.

¹¹ E. N. Chernykh, *Ancient Metallurgy in the USSR. The Early Metal Age* (Cambridge 1992) pp. 302-7. See also more generally F. T. Hiebert and N. I. Shishlina, 'Ancient Eurasian Pastoralists and the Environment', in V. Olkhovskiy, ed., *Archaeology, Palaeoecology and Palaeodemography of Eurasia* (Moscow 2000).

¹² P. M. Dolukhanov, *The Early Slavs: Eastern Europe from the Initial Settlement to Kievan Rus'* (London 1996) p. 48.

¹³ Christian (1998) *op. cit.* p. 91.

¹⁴ R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia* (Princeton 1996) pp. 32-3.

¹⁵ H. P. Francfort, 'The early periods of Shortughai (Harappan) and the western Bactria culture of Dasht-e', in B. Allchin, ed., *South Asian Archaeology 1983* (Cambridge 1984) pp. 170-5; A. Parpola, 'The Coming of the Aryans to Iran and India and the cultural and ethnic identity of the Dasas', *Snaha Orientalis* 64 (1988) pp. 195-209.

embryonic urban civilisation in Central Asia has emerged – the so-called ‘Oxus Civilisation’, based in the Margiana oasis and further east, in oases watered by the Amu Darya and Zeravshan.¹⁶ The Oxus sites apparently developed late in the third millennium BCE,¹⁷ primarily to facilitate trade between the indigenous sedentary agriculturists and the neighbouring steppe-nomadic pastoralists. As will be argued in Chapter Five, there is also sufficient evidence to argue that the Oxus Civilisation was part of a Eurasia-wide exchange network linking Mesopotamia, northern India and even China in a flourishing trade network by as early as c. 2000 BCE.¹⁸ By the first millennium BCE the Yuezhi may also have been a part of this network, importing jade from Khotan and Yarkand into Zhou China, as will be argued below.

The development of the Oxus Civilisation was a direct result of the migrations into Central Asia by Indo-European-speaking nomads because, as noted above, when these migrations commenced the region was inhabited only by small communities of subsistence agriculturists and hunter-gatherers. It was into this relatively sparsely-populated and undeveloped semi-sedentary agrarian landscape, then, that various groups of nomads, representing the first wave of a protracted period of invasion, began to arrive from the mid to late fourth millennium BCE. As Khazanov has argued, amongst these early pastoralist communities, whose horse-riding skills and equipment were undoubtedly rudimentary, the speed of migration would probably have been slow and gradual.¹⁹ Harmatta finds evidence of widespread migratory episodes through the region of pastoralists with ox-drawn carts and powerful tribal leaders, and Chernykh has argued that the substantial number of ornamental metal objects discovered at steppeland burial sites dating from the late – fourth millennium is evidence of the arrival of powerful chiefs and associated aristocracies.²⁰ If the region was indeed one of low population densities, the invading nomads would have occupied sparsely-populated lands and easily expelled the residents. Viewed from a Eurasian-wide perspective, then, the impact of the Indo-European migrations varied considerably according to the level of socio-political and technological development already achieved in the occupied regions. In Mesopotamia and across the Fertile Crescent in general, although the invaders were able to establish themselves as ruling aristocracies, they were rapidly assimilated into the prevailing more ‘advanced’ cultures. In the less-developed regions of Inner Asia, however, it was the Indo-European invaders who imposed their languages, culture and social organisation upon the geo-political landscape.²¹

¹⁶ For a general introduction to the subject see G. Ligabue and S. Salvatori, eds., *Bactria: An Ancient Civilization from the Sands of Afghanistan* (Venice 1989).

¹⁷ Here again there is disagreement between Russian and western archaeologists over dates for both the Namazga V and VI strata. See for example P.L. Kohl, ed., *The Bronze Age Civilization of Central Asia – Recent Soviet Discoveries* (New York 1981) p. xxix; and F.T. Hiebert, *Origins of the Bronze Age Oasis Civilization in Central Asia* (Cambridge Mass. 1994) p. 374. There is general agreement on a relative internal chronology, however, based on the ceramics. See L. Pyankova, ‘Central Asia in the Bronze Age: sedentary and nomadic cultures’, *Antiquity* (1994), 68, p. 355.

¹⁸ D. Christian, ‘Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History’, in D. Christian and J. Benjamin, eds., *Realms of the Silk Roads. Ancient and Modern* (Turnhout 2000) p. 81.

¹⁹ Khazanov *op. cit.*, p. 94.

²⁰ J. Harmatta, ‘The emergence of the Indo-Iranians: the Indo-Iranian languages’, in J. Harmatta, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia vol. II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations 700 B.C. to A.D. 250* (Paris 1994) pp. 367–8, Chernykh *op. cit.*, p. 304.

²¹ For a general consideration of the syncretic nature of Central Asian populations see L. Krader, *Peoples of Central Asia* (Bloomington and The Hague 1971).

Indo-European Bronze Age Migrations

The nomadic invasions of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor between c. 2500 and 1600 BCE have been well documented. Groups such as the Kassites, the rulers of Mitanni, the Hurrians, the Luwians and the Hittites all made a significant impact upon the sedentary urban-based states of the Fertile Crescent. The progress and effects of Indo-European migrations into Inner Asia are less well understood, although Mallory provides an excellent overview of archaeological research into the 'problem' of Indo-European migration across the steppes.²² Further chronological disagreement between western and Russian archaeologists over the dating of Indo-European migrations is just one of the problems associated with the subject.²³ The eastward migratory waves outlined above certainly find a degree of correspondence with the divisions applied to the Bronze Age by Soviet and Russian archaeologists, who tend to date the Early Bronze Age from the late - fourth millennium to c. 2500 BCE, the Middle Bronze Age to about 1800 BCE, and the Late Bronze Age to the end of the second millennium.²⁴ Clearly there are differences, however, particularly with dates for the end stages of both the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, and these tend to impact upon tentative dates that might be proposed for the arrival of ancestors of the Yuezhi into southern Siberia, and later in the Gansu. Specific chronological discrepancies might best be considered as part of a more detailed analysis of the evidence for these arrivals provided below.

Less in dispute is Russian archaeological evidence of nomadic invasions from the western steppes through southern Siberia and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, extending progressively further east with each wave of migration. Gimbutas argues that each successive wave of Indo-European pastoralist expansion can be followed by tracing the incidence and variety of barrows (called *kurgans* in Turkic) which mark the burial sites of the different nomadic migrant cultures.²⁵ Much of the archaeological evidence for the Early Bronze Age comes mainly from the western steppes, particularly the pit-grave *yamnaya* pastoralist culture that flourished from between the Bug and Dniester rivers in the west to the Ural River.²⁶ The pit-grave culture provides evidence of horse riding, and also of the use of wheeled-vehicles on the steppe that might have been vital in the logistics of mass migration, including both two and four-wheeled wagons that were probably pulled by oxen.²⁷ Many of the metal goods discovered in *yamnaya* sites, including daggers, axes and maces, had been imported from agricultural metal-working zones, indicating that pastoralists, farmers and artisans of the western steppes were already linked into a single regional system of exchanges as early as the mid - fourth millennium, which Chernykh has termed the 'Circumpontic metallurgical province'.²⁸

²² J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans* (London 1989).

²³ See for example M. Gimbutas, 'Proto-Indo-European Culture', in G. Cardona et al., *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans, Papers Presented at the Third Indo-European Conference at the University of Pennsylvania* (Univ. of Pennsylvania 1970) pp. 155 ff.

²⁴ Christian (1998a) *op. cit.*, p. 99.

²⁵ See for example M. Gimbutas, 'An Archaeologist's View of P.I.E. in 1975', in *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 2:3 (1975) pp. 289-307.

²⁶ Mallory *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11.

²⁷ Mallory *ibid.* p. 213; V.P. Shilov, 'The origins of migration and animal husbandry in the steppes of eastern Europe', in J. Clutton-Brock, ed., *The Walking Larder* (London 1989) pp. 120-3; S. Piggott, *The Earliest Wheeled Transport* (London 1983) pp. 54-60.

²⁸ Chernykh *op. cit.*, pp. 55, 159, 165.

The Afanasevo Culture

By the Middle Bronze Age, pastoral nomads had migrated further to the east, occupying parts of southern Siberia and the Central Asiatic steppes, driven perhaps by over-population in the western steppes or by climate change. The most significant pastoralist culture of the central and southern steppes is that of the Afanasevo, named after the site of Afanasyeva Gora excavated in 1920. Their cultural artefacts excavated from a number of burial sites show distinct similarities to those of the pit-grave cultures, suggesting that the Afanasevo culture was a product of pastoral nomadic migrants from the west, combined with the assimilation of indigenous hunter-gatherer populations.²⁹ As such the Afanasevo culture provides evidence of a single expanding zone of pastoralist lifeways characterised by a uniform nomadic monoculture with occasional regional variations.³⁰ The Afanasevo culture also represents perhaps the most easterly extension of the European steppe cultural expansion. Mallory and Mair have argued that the movement may not have halted at the Altai, but perhaps extended southwards at some subsequent date into the Gansu and Tarim Basin, an argument which will be considered below in more detail.³¹

It is at least arguable that the ancestors of the Yuezhi dynasty must also be found somewhere in this single expanding zone, part of the most easterly extension of concentric and consecutive waves of migration that stemmed from a single, original source, and a dominant mono-cultural tradition. The date of their initial migration to western Inner Asia must surely be located somewhere in this Middle Bronze Age period of the mid to late-third millennium (although Mallory and Mair date the Afanasevo culture somewhat earlier, from the late-fourth to early-third millennium)³² because the third migratory wave of the Late Bronze Age was of Iranian-speaking invaders who pushed (and then overlaid) the earlier Indo-European migrants further south to the Gansu. This was also the general position of W. B. Henning who argued in 1978 that the Yuezhi/Tocharians must have set out on their migration 'earlier ... than the Indo-Iranians ... we should expect the Proto-Tocharians about 2000 BC, or even earlier'.³³

Indo-Iranian Invasions of the Late Bronze Age

The evidence for the overlay of Indo-Iranian-speaking cultures upon the earlier Indo-European strata, as well as the physical displacement of the Indo-European invaders, is both philological and archaeological. That there were two major Indo-European branch language groups spoken by the different groups of nomads is indisputable – the Indo-European *centum* and the Indo-Iranian *satem* branches. By the Late Bronze Age there is evidence of widespread disruption across the steppes, indicative of a third

²⁹ See A. P. Okladnikov, 'Inner Asia at the Dawn of History', in D. Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge 1990, reprint 1994) pp. 79 ff. for a discussion of the Afanasevo culture: 'Physically the Afanasevo peoples belonged to the Europoid race and resembled the Cro-Magnon peoples of Eastern Europe, to whom are attributed the monuments of the pit-grave culture', p. 80.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.

³¹ J. P. Mallory and V. H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies* (London 2000) p. 242.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ W. B. Henning, 'The First Indo-Europeans in History', in G. L. Ulmann, ed., *Society and History: Essays in Honor of Karl August Wittfogel* (The Hague-Paris-New York 1978) pp. 215–230.

wave of large-scale migration, this time most probably by pastoral nomads speaking an Indo-Iranian branch. B.A. Litvinsky, considering a similar sequence in Xinjiang, has argued that here also the earlier layer of Indo-European-speaking peoples, which had settled in 'eastern Turkestan' by at least the early second millennium, was subsequently replaced by an Indo-Iranian-speaking group.¹⁴ By occupying the western and southern regions of Xinjiang, he argues, the later invaders 'wedged' the earlier Indo-European migrants (including perhaps the Yuezhi in his interpretation) into eastern Xinjiang. However Litvinsky appears more confident than the evidence necessarily allows. Mallory and Mair find the search for the origins and dispersal of the Indo-Iranians 'one of the great puzzles of Indo-European studies since the evidence could not be more contradictory'.¹⁵ They do agree, however, that even this contradictory evidence for the Indo-Iranian invaders does indicate that sometime in the Late Bronze Age (perhaps between c. 2000 – c. 1500 BCE) steppe tribes of Indo-Iranian origin penetrated at least western Central Asia and 'were actively engaged in exchange with the more settled oasis communities'.¹⁶

The Andronovo Culture

The steppe-bronze culture that emerged in the wake of this invasion is known as the 'Andronovo', which Frye and most other scholars in the field clearly identify as being of Indo-Iranian-speaking origin.¹⁷ The Andronovans lived in small, fortified villages and towns in large houses that were at least partly subterranean. Their economy was based on stockbreeding (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses) and their lifeway was one of mobile pastoralism with occasional periods of semi-sedentary agriculture.¹⁸ The immediate predecessor to the Andronovans was the Sintashta culture (c. 2300–1900) which was based in the southeastern Urals, particularly near modern Magnitogorsk. Associated with the emergence of both the Sintashta and subsequent Andronovo cultures was the appearance of many fortified settlements and royal burials with chariots, indicative perhaps of the troubled nature of this period.¹⁹

The chariot was not destined to make any significant military impact on Inner Asian geo-politics, however. Although the introduction of the chariot certainly transformed warfare in South West Asia and India, it was less practical in the steppes of Central Asia and was replaced from about 1500 BCE by more effective horse-riding archer warriors using compound bows.²⁰ It was pastoral nomadic forces of this type that the Zhou and Han chroniclers later described when discussing the 'barbarians' to China's north, including the Wusun, Xiongnu and even Yuezhi. The Andronovan culture

¹⁴ B.A. Litvinsky, 'Problems of history and culture of eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) in antiquity', in *Circle of Inner Asian Art Newsletter* No. 4 (Dec 1996) p. 14.

¹⁵ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 258.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁷ Frye *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁸ See for example Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, pp. 260–261; and E.E. Kuzmina, *Drevneyshie skotovodch at Urals do Tyan-Shanya* (Izruze 1986), in particular pp. 37–44.

¹⁹ See D.W. Anthony and N.B. Vinogradov, 'Birth of the chariot', *Archaeology* (1995), 48(2) pp. 36–41; V.M. Masson, 'The decline of the Bronze Age civilization and movements of the tribes', in Dani, A.H. and Masson, V.M., eds., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia vol. 1: The Dawn of Civilization, earliest times to 700 B.C.* (Paris 1992) pp. 347–8. On the eastward spread of the chariot, and particularly on the evidence of rock engravings of chariots discovered in the Altai region of Mongolia, see E.A. Novgorodova, 'Ethnocultural Relations of the Tribes of the Mongol Altai' in T. Ligeti, ed., *Researches in Altai Languages* (Budapest 1975) pp. 195–198.

²⁰ Anthony and Vinogradov *op. cit.*, p. 40.

continued to spread eastwards through present-day Kazakhstan and into eastern Central Asia. Tentative archaeological evidence indicates the eventual existence of a dividing line that developed in Mongolia (the Altai-Yenisei region) between both the Indo-European Afanasevian and Indo-Iranian Andronovan migrants from the west and the ethnic Proto-Mongolians in the east, representing the most easterly expansion of the invaders through northern Inner Asia by c. 1800 - 1500 BCE.⁴¹

To the south, beyond the reach of Soviet and Russian archaeologists, the evidence is less plentiful, but both Indo-European and Indo-Iranian pastoral nomads must also have spread (or were pushed?) into the eastern steppes, particularly along already well-trodden routes through the Tarim Basin, until they were brought to a halt perhaps by the indigenous peoples who dwelt in eastern Mongolia and along China's north-western borders. The complex question of evidence for the infiltration of both the Gansu and Xinjiang by Europoid and Iranian groups will be considered below, but the route options available to the nomads were clearly delineated and limited by geography. The paths and tracks that would become the principal trade routes of the 'Silk Roads' during the Classical Era had been in existence for millennia, and were indeed well used by migrants and merchants alike from at least the early Bronze Age if not before.⁴² These first arteries of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange were thus very much a product of the pastoral nomadic invasions. As Franck and Brownstone put it:

'At a very early time, nomads were bringing to the cities copper, tin and turquoise from Iran, gold from the Altai Mountains of Mongolia, lapis lazuli and rubies from Afghanistan, furs from Siberia, incense from Arabia, cottons from India, and their own products, like wool, hides and livestock. In the process they carved out the main routes across Asia, among them the Silk Road'.⁴³

One might add to that list jade from Khotan and Yarkand in the western Tarim Basin, which would be carried to the Zhou Court of China in the first millennium by groups identified as Yuezhi in the Chinese sources, as will be shown below. Before that, however, and following the consideration above of Soviet and Russian archaeological evidence of Bronze Age migrations across the steppes of southern Russia, Siberia and Central Asia, it is important also to examine the evidence of some eighty years of archaeological research in China. It must be admitted at the outset, however, that at this stage the Chinese material shows little promise and even less result in the provision of material evidence for the proto-Yuezhi.

II

Chinese Archaeological Evidence

Historical Overview

Although archaeological evidence from Chinese Central Asia is considerably less prolific than that from former Soviet Central Asia or West Asia, research has been ongoing in both Xinjiang and the Gansu for several decades. In 1923 J.G. Andersson began a series of benchmark explorations in the Gansu in particular that concentrated

⁴¹ Kazmina *op. cit.* p. 132; F.A. Novgorodova, *Drevnyaya Mongoliya* (Moscow 1989) pp 316-21.

⁴² As an example of this see Christian (2000) *op. cit.* pp. 67 ff.

⁴³ I.M. Franck and D.M. Brownstone, *The Silk Road, A History* (New York and Oxford 1986) p. 39.

on painted-pottery sites.⁴⁴ Over the next decade he unearthed an astonishing range of artifacts from a large number of Gansu sites, the most striking of which were beautifully painted pottery vessels including urns, jars, vases and bowls. This material confirmed that the natural funnel of the Gansu Corridor had been a rich centre of prehistoric cultures and of contact between cultures. No sooner had this material come to light than comparisons between the decor and shape of Gansu pottery were made with the painted pottery of Western Asia. This in turn led to suggestions that the ware was actually a cultural import from the west, and that its makers (the 'Proto-Chinese') were migrants who had arrived in the Gansu sometime before c. 3000 BCE.⁴⁵ This theory has since been largely discounted because it was based on the very tenuous evidence of a perceived similarity between the pottery of the Gansu and Western Asia, and at any rate the dates proposed for such an Indo-European invasion of the region are up to a millennium too early.⁴⁶ Andersson, as will be shown below, produced a tentative chronological site-sequence based on stylistic evolution in the Gansu which placed the 'Yangshao' Culture between approximately 2200 and 1700 BCE.⁴⁷ In 1966 Pulleyblank suggested possibly identifying the proto-Yuezhi with the Qijia Culture,⁴⁸ which archaeologist Kwang Chih Chang has suggested exhibits distinct stylistic differences from both the Yangshao which preceded it and the Zhou strata that followed.⁴⁹ But the identification is tenuous and controversial, although A.K. Narain also tentatively nominates both the Yangshao and Qijia peoples as potential candidates for an autochthonous Indo-European culture, a conclusion that will also be considered below.⁵⁰

Thus, despite the undeniable literary 'history' for the Yuezhi outlined in the Zhou, Qin and Han Annals, any confident conclusion that these sources provide indisputable and comprehensive evidence for anything more than the bare existence of the dynasty must be tempered by an almost complete lack of corroborative archaeological material – a fact recognised by all researchers in the field. Indeed Narain is perhaps too optimistic in finding the archaeological evidence at best 'ambivalent',⁵¹ or in suggesting that 'archaeology has just begun confirming this process already known to history and tradition as well'.⁵² Any such confirmation remains highly elusive, and Pulleyblank only states the obvious when declaring that 'we are badly in need of aid from archaeologists to help identify the Yuezhi in the Gansu and to enable us to come to some conclusion about when they arrived there'.⁵³ Despite the fact that archaeological research in the Gansu has the longest and most developed tradition of all Chinese archaeology, even there in the historically-attested homeland of the

⁴⁴ J.G. Andersson, 'Researches into the Prehistory of the Chinese', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* No. 15 (Stockholm 1943) pp. 1-304.

⁴⁵ See for example W.W. Fairservis, *The Origins of Oriental Civilization* (New York 1959) pp. 102-114 for an expression of this now outmoded view.

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion see W. Willetts, *Chinese Art* vol. 1 (Harmondsworth 1958) p. 44; and Andersson *op. cit.*, n. p. 37, and pp. 280-91.

⁴⁷ See Willetts *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ F.G. Pulleyblank, 'Chinese and Indo-Europeans', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London 1966) p. 29.

⁴⁹ Kwang Chih Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* 3rd Edition (New Haven and London 1977) pp. 195-199.

⁵⁰ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵³ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 458.

Yuezhi there is almost no material information confirming that literary evidence, and what precious little there is is ambiguous. However any attempt to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of the origin of the Yuezhi requires an analysis of all potential sources of information, including whatever might be gleaned from Chinese archaeology. As noted above, the pioneering work of Andersson was the foundation upon which subsequent research has been built, and as such his methods provide the logical introduction to the pre- and early-dynastic archaeology of northern and northwestern China.

Pre- and Proto-Historic Archaeology of the Gansu and Northern China

Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874-1960) was a geologist by training who became the virtual 'father' of modern Chinese archaeology. When he arrived in Beijing in 1914 it was to take up a post as adviser on mining to the Geological Survey of China. However his interest turned to fossils of mammals and a substantial number were unearthed, particularly in Henan Province. In 1929 Andersson was intrigued by some unusual specimens uncovered near the village of Yangshao in Henan, but following the coincidental discovery of unique painted pottery samples at the same site he became increasingly absorbed by archaeology. He soon abandoned Henan for the Gansu in particular, and between 1923 and 1924 led half a dozen archaeological expeditions to the region.⁵⁴ In two years he discovered more than fifty pre- and proto-historic sites and necropolises, some of which gave their names to cultures and established chronological reference points that remain valid today, particularly the Yangshao and Majiayao cultures.⁵⁵ However, more recently leading Chinese archaeologists have cast doubts on many of the conclusions of Andersson. Cheng Tekun, for example, realising that Andersson, who had gone to the Gansu to 'trace the origin of diffusion of the Painted Pottery from the West into China', was richly rewarded by the string of discoveries he made, has been none the less critical of the Swede's methods:

'Unfortunately his field-work was brief and his preconceived idea had set the course of his investigation, which was based mainly on the Painted Pottery. He found that this decorative art was a common feature of practically all the sites in the region, and the characteristics of the finds from each site could be easily distinguished. Thus the Gansu sites were grouped chronologically according to the relative maturity of their artistic expression. The discoveries of Andersson were indeed spectacular and the chronological sequences which he and his followers had established, epoch-making. But since the foundation was laid mainly on the thin ground of a comparative study of some decorative patterns, his chronological structure for the area did not stand for long. It has been crumbling bit by bit ever since, as his sites have been re-examined and new sites excavated'.⁵⁶

Despite this, the conclusions reached by Andersson nearly eighty years ago are still referred to by numerous Inner Asian historians as a reliable basis for definitive statements on such topics as the origin of the Indo-Europeans, the date of their arrival in the Gansu, and whether all Indo-Europeans might even be autochthonous to northwestern China. If Andersson's chronology and indeed technique are now on

⁵⁴ The name 'Gansu' (Kansu in W.G.) is a comparatively recent designation for the region, and was compounded from the names of two of the principal oases in the region – Kanchou and Suchou.

⁵⁵ For a succinct account of the career of Andersson see C. Debaene-Francfort, *The Search for Ancient China*, trans. P. G. Bahn (London 1999) pp. 25-28.

⁵⁶ Cheng Tekun, *New Light of Prehistoric China* (Cambridge 1966) pp. 24-5.

decidedly shaky ground amongst leading Chinese archaeologists, then surely his conclusions are no longer of much use to Yuezhi scholarship. In addition, more recent archaeological research has provided considerably more information on the chronology and succession of cultures established in China's north and northwest, as the following comparison between Andersson and more modern archaeologists indicates (all dates *circa* and BCE, all names transliterated in Pinyin):

Andersson ⁵⁷	More Recent Dates ⁵⁸
Chizhiaping: 2500-2200	Cishan-Peiligang: 5500-4900
Yangshao: 2200-1700	Yangshao: 4800-2500
Machang: 1700-1300	Majiayao: 3500-1500
Xintien: 1300-1000	Longshan: 2500-1700

Each of the four main pre- and proto-historic cultures appear to have developed from their predecessors, and there is little evidence of the arrival of any invading groups (Indo-European or otherwise) let alone of their having been responsible for the import of new and distinctive cultural artifacts or artistic styles. Cheng Te-kun is emphatic, for example, that Majiayao was an evolutionary product of Yangshao: 'The advanced type of Yangshao in Upper Huanghe is now represented by Majiayao, the remains of which have been found distributed over a wide territory'.⁵⁹ The Majiayao is also known as the 'Gansu Yangshao', and it appeared from c. 3500 BCE as a culture based on hoe-farming with hunting, fishing and the domestication of pigs and dogs. Majiayao dwellings were mainly semi-subterranean pits with a fireplace in the dwelling floor, and their pottery is decorated with geometric patterns that developed from zoomorphic elements, particularly the bird and the frog.⁶⁰ Of most significance perhaps, particularly in light of more recent attempts by Zadneprovsky to identify the Yuezhi by a particular burial type (the 'podboy', discussed in Chapter Two) is the nature of all pre-dynastic cultural cemeteries, which in the case of the Majiayao were rectangular pits with the bodies lying on their sides in hocker position.⁶¹ Vast numbers of Majiayao necropolises have been found, including the cemetery at Liuwan which contained 1500 tombs.

Until two decades ago the Longshan culture was regarded as possibly an independent, non-evolutionary cultural development, marking it as at least a potential candidate for identification with Indo-European invaders, but the consensus view today would hold that Longshan too was simply a more advanced form of Yangshao. The fact that almost all Longshan sites have been discovered east of the Middle and Lower Huanghe and out to the east coast indicates that its development was well outside of the area of possible nomadic settlement anyway. Longshan was also an agricultural culture based on hoe-farming, but with a greater range and more substantial numbers of domesticated animals including pigs, dogs, cattle and sheep. Dwellings were more

⁵⁷ Willets *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁵⁸ See C. Dehane-Francfort *op. cit.*, pp. 142-3.

⁵⁹ Cheng Te-kun *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

complex, including storage pits and white plaster paving on the floors and walls, and the dead were buried in individual pits fully stretched on their backs.⁶²

It was the appearance of three royal dynasties – the Xia (c. 2000-1600), Shang (c. 1600-1050) and Zhou (c. 1050-221) – that marked the end of Chinese pre-history and the beginning of Chinese ‘civilisation’. But the dazzling archaeological evidence for these mature Bronze Age cultures has so far left unanswered the intriguing question of from where this sophisticated culture, including advanced metallurgy, sprang so suddenly. The original and obvious answer proposed – that it was as a result of contact with immigrant Indo-European peoples from Western and Central Asia – was rejected by nationally-sensitive Sino-archaeologists, and fortunately this thorny topic remains largely outside of the scope of this book.⁶³ Although the question remains unanswered, however, more recent discoveries have unearthed a possible ‘missing link’ between the Neolithic cultures and the Bronze Age civilisations, particularly at the site of Erlitou near Anyang, where examples of crude metallurgy have been found.⁶⁴

The Qijia Culture

If archaeological evidence of Indo-European invaders is to be found anywhere in China, it will surely be in the north and northwestern provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, Xinjiang and Qinghai, rather than in the Anyang Valley of Henan Province. As early as 1966 Pulleyblank nominated the Qijia culture (named after its type-site at Qijiaping in the Daoho Valley of the eastern Gansu) as a possible candidate for identification with the proto-Yuezhi,⁶⁵ and he has continued to maintain that possibility until more recently.⁶⁶ Kwang Chih Chang, building on Andersson’s Gansu work, has identified certain striking stylistic differences between the painted pottery motifs of the Yangshao and Majiayao cultural remains discovered in Shanxi and Henan, and those unearthed in Gansu and Qinghai, although he remains convinced that the Gansu/Qinghai types are essentially western extensions of the earlier Shanxi Yangshao.⁶⁷ However Chang does admit to a degree of uncertainty concerning the origin of the Qijia, although he is confident enough to place it broadly between the Yangshao and the Western Zhou.⁶⁸ Of more relevant interest, however, is the possibility that Qijia may well have been a product of cultural interaction between the indigenous Yangshao and groups from the adjacent steppes, which Chang somewhat ambiguously identifies as ‘cultural phases having a native sub-Neolithic base’ (i.e. an indigenous culture separate from, and different to, the Yangshao farmers):

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See J. Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge 1990) p. 20, for a very commonsense approach to this matter: ‘Because of the very different elements which have shared in its foundation and in the course of time enriched and transformed it, Chinese civilization has been, like the other great civilizations of history, a perpetual creation’.

⁶⁴ C. Debanne-Francfort *op. cit.*, pp. 55-8. See also an article by Zhang Yuzhong, ‘Early Bronzes Discovered in Xinjiang’, *CIAA* No. 15 (June 2002) pp. 17-21 which documents the discovery of bronze threads unearthed in Xinjiang dating from as early as c. 2000 BCE. Later artefacts discovered along both the northern and southern Tarim Basin routes have been attributed to the Xiongnu and Sakas.

⁶⁵ Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 458.

⁶⁷ Kwang Chih Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* 4th Edition (New Haven and London 1986) pp. 140-1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 195.

'It is possible that in this area, which is adjacent to the dry steppes of northwest China and Inner Mongolia, and where climatic conditions of the present time tend to be on the arid side, the Yangshao farming culture was not well adapted and was replaced by cultural phases having a native sub-Neolithic base but receiving considerable cultural influence from the Yangshao farmers. The nature of its contemporary cultural phases and the many local cultural traditions that followed the Qijia seem to indicate this possibility' (*ibid.* in the 4th Edition 'although the indigenous base remains to be identified').⁶⁹

Narain is of course quite correct in suggesting that there is little evidence to indicate that this indigenous base might be of 'imported' origin,⁷⁰ but the fact that the Qijia seems to be a cultural development based at least in part on interaction between the Yangshao farming traditions and unknown 'indigenously based' cultural influences (perhaps) from the steppes is intriguing. Radio-carbon dating of Qijia sites also places them broadly in the possible range of potential Indo-European arrivals on the 'dry and arid' steppes, between c. 2500–1500 BCE.⁷¹ Narain, Pulleyblank and Chang have each noted the very important fact that radiocarbon dates on copper artifacts discovered at the Qijia site at Dahezhuang (2150–1780 BCE) makes them 'one of the earliest dated metal finds in China'.⁷² However all Qijia burials so far uncovered have revealed people of the 'Mongoloid' physical type, and there is no real suggestion that they were anything other than 'ethnic Chinese'. None the less the evidence does not rule out the possibility that the Qijia culture was in contact with peoples of the steppes, from whom it may have obtained its livestock and metal implements. Mallory and Mair identify these implements as 'typical of the Seima-Turbino horizon of the Eurasian steppe'.⁷³ This combination of generally permissible dates, a cultural evolution perhaps based on interaction and exchange between Yangshao and unknown steppe influences, and the appearance of some of the oldest datable metal objects in Chinese archaeology makes the Qijia the only real candidate for identification as an early Chinese culture influenced by contact with Indo-European nomads. Certainly interaction between the Qijia and the Afanasevo culture is not beyond the realms of possibility. At the very least the evidence indicates the probable presence of indigenously-based nomadic cultures in the steppe regions contiguous to the Gansu by the late - third or early - second millennium BCE.

Archaeology in Xinjiang

From early in the twentieth century explorers like Sir Aurel Stein began finding 'mummified' remains at a number of sites in the Tarim Basin (present day Xinjiang). More recently, since the 1980's in particular, several hundred such 'mummies' (actually the remains of desiccated bodies) have been discovered in the region, many of them by teams under the direction of Victor Mair.⁷⁴ The oldest of these corpses dates from c. 2000 BCE, and the earliest Indo-European corpses from perhaps c. 1750, which suggests at the very least that from the Late-Bronze Age a significant and increasing proportion of the population of Xinjiang began to be of Indo-European/Caucasoid ethnicity. By 1996 Victor Mair was entertaining high hopes indeed of the evidence of the 'Urumqi Mummies':

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–99.

⁷⁰ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷¹ Chang *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁷² Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷³ Mallory and Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁷⁴ V. H. Mair, 'Mummies of the Tarim Basin', *Archaeology* 48(2) (1995) pp. 28–48.

'What is particularly remarkable about these corpses is that, in terms of their physical characteristics, they are clearly Caucasoid or Europoid, especially before about 500 BC – when the Mongoloid peoples began to show up on the eastern fringe in increasing numbers. The implications of these early peoples in the Tarim Basin for the history of Eurasian civilization are enormous. Their accurate identification will almost certainly lead to a better understanding of such problems as the origins of the Indo-Europeans, the introduction of the domestic horse and wheeled vehicles to East Asia, and the transmission of bronze across Eurasia.'⁷⁸

Since then many of the bodies have been subjected to DNA and textile analysis, but whilst it is very tempting to identify at least some of the mummies as Yuezhi, the evidence has remained inconclusive.⁷⁹ DNA analysis, part of the developing field of 'molecular archaeology', has so far proven itself to be (in the words of Mallory and Mair) 'more of a hope than a solution to our problem',⁸⁰ because it is impossible (at this stage) to draw firm conclusions from the molecular analysis of the human skeletal remains of relevant ancient cultures, such as Afanasevo, Andronovo or Saka. Likewise the evidence of textiles remains fragmentary because the cloths discovered (which constitute one of the largest collections of ancient textiles known) depend on highly specific environmental conditions, although Elizabeth Barber does tentatively agree that textile analysis suggests a direct historical connection (by way of migration) between the Indo-European's original homelands and the Tarim Basin.⁸¹

Archaeological research into the pre-historic cultures of the Tarim Basin has gathered pace considerably from the 1990s and into the 3rd Millennium.⁸² Evidence of a number of cultures has been uncovered, the earliest of which appears to be the Qawrighul (early – second millennium), remains of which have been found some 70 kilometres west of Lopnur.⁸³ Mummies of the Yanbulaq culture (located near Hami and dated c. 1750-700 BCE?) were mainly of Mongoloid stock, although the eight Caucasoid types found are perhaps the oldest Europoid human remains so far discovered in the Tarim. The presence of three different grave types has led Mallory and Mair to suggest that 'we may be witnessing the movement of Caucasoid populations into a territory in which Mongoloid populations had already established themselves from the east'.⁸⁴ These and a number of other oasis-based cultures are all associated with both painted pottery wares and coarse wares, indicating the influence on each of the two ceramic traditions of different Tarim Basin cultures of both Gansu

⁷⁸ V.H. Mair, abstract of paper presented at the Conference on the Bronze Age and Iron Age Peoples of Eastern Central Asia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 19-21, 1996.

⁷⁹ See Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 2; V.H. Mair, 'Prehistoric Caucasoid corpses of the Tarim Basin', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* (1995a) 23(3and 4) pp. 257-307.

⁸⁰ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, pp. 247-8.

⁸¹ See for example E.J. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles* (Princeton 1991), and E.J. Barber 'A weaver's-eye view of the second millennium Tarim Basin finds', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 23, pp. 347-355.

⁸² The most convenient way of keeping up to date with developments in pre- and proto-historic Xinjiang (and Gansu) archaeology is through the Circle of Inner Asian Art Newsletters. See for example: 'Recent Information on Selected Sites in the Tarim Basin', CIAA No. 2 (April 1996), pp. 4-5; 'The Franco-Chinese Expedition to the Keriya Valley', CIAA No. 3 (July 1996) p. 5; S. Juhl, 'Burial Sites in Northwest China', CIAA No. 5 (May 1997) pp. 7-8; Zhou Jingling, 'The Chawuhu Culture in Xinjiang', CIAA No. 7 (April 1998) pp. 3-6; Zhang Yuzhong, 'Early Bronzes Discovered in Xinjiang', CIAA No. 15 (June 2002) pp. 17-21.

⁸³ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, pp. 136-140.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

semi-sedentary cultures and those of the steppe peoples to the northwest. Racial types vary, and the physical traits of exhumed mummies indicate conclusively the presence of both Mongoloid and Caucasian types. The evidence, sketchy as it is, seems unequivocally to indicate the arrival of Indo-Europeans amongst previously Mongoloid cultures. As Mallory and Mair suggest:

If the weight of the admittedly patchy evidence is applied, a most circumstantial case can be made for a major influx of Bronze Age Caucasian populations, whose subsistence basis (wheat, barley, domestic sheep, horse, donkey and camel) material culture (bronze and wheeled vehicles) and mortuary constructions were similar to those found across the steppelands and West Central Asia (e.g. wooden chambers, mud-brick constructions, concentric circles, *kazhs* and stone-walled enclosures).⁸²

However Mallory and Mair find no reason to associate any of these remains with the Yuezhi in particular, and in fact are highly sceptical of attempts to identify any of the several hundred Tarim Basin mummies so far discovered as Yuezhi. They argue that the Yuezhi have an historical existence only, not an archaeological one:

If the Chinese histories had never mentioned the Yuezhi on the borders of China, no archaeologist would have had the slightest reason to postulate their existence. The Yuezhi are 'ghosts' summoned up by historians to torment archaeologists.⁸³

Their difficulty in accepting any of the mummies as potential Yuezhi aside, Mallory and Mair do find strong links between the Tocharian-speaking cultures (whether Yuezhi or not) and the Afanasevo culture.⁸⁴ As noted above, the Afanasevans spoke an Indo-European language that found itself linguistically isolated far to the east, trapped behind later Indo-Iranian dialects to the west. By the time the Andronovo Indo-Iranian-speaking culture emerged, the Afanasevo had already disappeared. It is at least possible that somewhere within the eastward migration of the Afanasevo, the Tocharian-speaking ancestors of the Yuezhi might be located, before they moved south into the Gansu. Mallory and Mair also argue that the Afanasevo may have spilled south through a gap at the eastern end of the Tien Shan and into the Tarim, which would at least allow for the possibility of identifying the Afanasevans as proto-Tocharians, the ancestors of the Yuezhi dynasty.

Although the centre of the Afanasevo culture lies far to the north of the Tarim, there is some evidence that it spilled southwards and Afanasevo sites have been claimed for both Mongolia and northern China. Some suggest that we may look even farther south, right into the heartland of the mummies of East Central Asia.⁸⁵

A tentative (and of course speculative) model would thus see the Afanasevo migrating south from their homeland in the Altai-Yenisei region, one branch towards the

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

⁸⁴ Mallory had earlier argued for a link between the Afanasevo and Tocharian cultures (1989), and Asko Parpola and Christian Carpelan have suggested a similar possibility. See C. Carpelan and A. Parpola, 'Emergence, contacts and dispersal of Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Uralic and Proto-Aryan in archaeological perspective', Pp. 55-150 in Christian Carpelan, Asko Parpola and Petteri Koskikallio (eds.), *Early contacts between Uralic and Indo-European: Linguistic and archaeological considerations*, (Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne, 242, Helsinki: Finno-Ugrian Society, 2001), pp. 55-150. See also Xu Wenkan, 'On the Origins of the Indo-Iranians', *CIAA Newsletter* 20 (July 2005) p.10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

Huanghe where they may have interacted with the Qipa culture of ethnic Chinese, and another southwest into the Gansu and Tarim areas. Subsequent migrations of Indo-Iranian-speaking nomads also entered the Tarim and established their languages on top of the earlier Indo-European dialects, but they were never able to achieve linguistic supremacy in the north and east where Tocharian remained dominant. The obvious route for both the Indo-Europeans and Indo-Iranians was south through a mountainous funnel that disgorges near Linqi, and which then offers passes to both the Dunhuang region of the Gansu, or southwest into the Turpan Basin and the eastern Tarim. Mallory and Mair's reconstruction is efficient in terms of both physical geography and linguistic evidence, allowing for both the Tocharian stable of languages and Indo-Iranian dialects to develop simultaneously. Therefore, many of the Bronze Age mummies discovered by archaeologists in East Central Asia should be consigned a possible proto-Tocharian identity.⁸⁶ If it were possible to establish an archaeological link between the Tocharians and the Yuezhi, then the mystery of the origin of the Yuezhi would be at least partially solved, even for the archaeologists. Of course such a link has not so far been forthcoming, and in the sceptical view of Mallory and Mair the Yuezhi remain historical 'ghosts'. But the historical evidence, not only for the existence of the Yuezhi but also for their identification as the Tocharians, is very strong. As will be argued below, the coincidence between the Chinese source description of the Yuezhi migration path to the Jii Basin and Bactria, and Ptolemy's location in his *Geographica* of various Tocharian-variant groups dwelling in locations that match closely the Chinese historical itinerary, is simply too close to ignore. Whilst archaeological evidence of the Yuezhi in China might be scarce, the other evidence is surely too strong to deny their history and impact.

Pastoral Nomadic Expansion in Mongolia

Meanwhile, while Indo-European Afanasevo groups were migrating south to take up residences in the Gansu and Xinjiang sometime between the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BCE, further to the east, and to the north of the main zones of irrigated agricultural communities along the valley of the Huanghe, large communities of Mongoloid pastoral nomads also began to emerge between the eighteenth and twelfth centuries. It was these and other pastoral nomadic communities (including the Gansu-centered Yuezhi) that would be listed in the chronicles of the Zhou Dynasty, as will be shown below. Further north again, in northern Inner Asia and southern Siberia, the 'Karasuk' culture replaced the Andronovo between the thirteenth and tenth centuries. Frye tentatively suggests that the Karasuk, like the Andronovans, were also Iranian speakers (or Sakas?)⁸⁷ and, as Christian puts it, their appearance is further evidence of an emerging East Asian pastoralism with an 'expansionist dynamic of its own'.⁸⁸ Gryaznov suggests that evidence of the importance of livestock to the Karasuk indicates that they followed more mobile lifeways than did the Andronovans, although the discovery of large dugout dwellings in the Minusinsk basin also indicates the retention of a semi-sedentised way of life.⁸⁹ The basin of Minusinsk is made up of undulating land on either side of the Yenisei River. It is one of the largest pre-historic graveyards in all of Eurasia, with numerous barrows having yielded vessels, amulets and weapons. Archaeological evidence clearly shows that

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-318.

⁸⁷ Frye (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁸⁸ Christian (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 106-7.

⁸⁹ M. Gryaznov, *The Ancient Civilization of Southern Siberia* (New York 1969) pp. 84-5, 97-8, 104.

from the middle of the second millennium BCE a succession of cultures and ethnicities occupied the region, each of which gradually adapted to a sedentised, agricultural lifeway.⁹⁰

The conflict that would be chronicled in the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* late in the third century of the first millennium BCE would involve both the Chinese agrarian civilisation of the Zhou, Qin and Han dynasties, and various groups engaged in this east Asian and east Central Asia expansionist and highly fluid dynamic. These included the (arguably) Indo-European/Afanasevian-descended dynasty of the Yuezhi on the one hand, and powerful groups from within the northern and eastern pastoral-nomadic zone on the other, both of indigenous Proto-Mongolian and immigrant Indo-Iranian-speaking ethnicity. With the exception of the apparent adoption of a semi-sedentised oasis-based lifeway by elements of both the Yuezhi and the Xiongnu (as will be shown in Chapter Two) the other groups outside of the Chinese realm remained essentially pastoral-nomadic. The gradual replacement of any pre-existing indigenous sedentised agrarian communities by successive waves of nomads was certainly completed by the early first millennium BCE, by which time pastoralism had eliminated most of the remaining farming populations of eastern Inner Asia, outside of the agrarian Chinese civilisation of the Zhou Dynasty. Before turning to that period, however, when textual evidence becomes available for the first time, it is necessary to consider the vexed question of the location of the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans who, in the three great periods of Bronze Age migration outlined above, migrated further and further to the east until they had occupied all of the western, central and east Asian steppes.

III

The Original Homeland of the Indo-Europeans

The location of the original homeland of both the Indo-European and Indo-Iranian Bronze Age invaders is a matter of continuing dispute, although the consensus philological view has historically placed it somewhere in southern Russia, including the Ukraine and the steppes east towards Kazakhstan. This 'Kurgan theory' (proposed originally by the late Marija Gimbutas) argues that the Proto-Indo-Europeans emerged c. 5000 BCE in southern Russia (north of the Black and Caspian Seas), when hunter-gatherer populations gradually adopted both semi-sedentised agriculture and mobile stock herding. From here the Indo-Europeans migrated out to the west, south and east in the three waves of Bronze Age migrations described above.⁹¹ This has remained the more accepted view, based as it is on both linguistic and archaeological evidence, and held by (amongst many others) scholars such as Henning, who in 1978 also argued for a homeland location somewhere to the north of the Caucasus in Southern Russia,⁹² and Frye who in 1999 similarly located the original Indo-European homeland 'somewhere' in south Russia, to the north of the Caucasus.⁹³ Two alternative locations have also been proposed, notably Anatolia⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See K. Jettmar, *The Art of the Steppes* (Baden Baden-London 1967) pp. 67 ff. for an excellent introduction to the discoveries made at Minusinsk.

⁹¹ In addition to the Gimbutas studies noted in fnns. 23 and 25 above, see also M. Gimbutas, *The Slavs* (London 1971).

⁹² Henning *op. cit.* pp. 215-230.

⁹³ Frye (1996) *op. cit.* p. 34.

and even the Gansu, the region in which the Yuezhi were dwelling when they first came to the notice of Han historians.⁹⁵

It is the shared vocabulary of most Indo-European languages that offers pointers to the probable nature of the original Indo-European environment and lifeway prior to dispersal. According to this evidence, the early Indo-Europeans lived in an area in which various trees grew (including alder, birch, elm and maple) and various wild mammals dwelt (including hare, squirrel, mouse, fox, wolf, bear and deer).⁹⁶ They were farmers and stock herders, an agricultural lifeway being revealed in the words for cereals, the sickle and plough, and domestication of animals in the various names for cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and dogs. However matching this cultural-linguistic record with archaeological evidence has been difficult, for the environmental criteria were probably widespread across most parts of temperate Eurasia. As Mallory and Mair succinctly put it: 'Throughout the course of the 20th Century there have been numerous candidates for Proto-Indo-European but few have presented a case robust enough to be still standing by the end of the century'.⁹⁷

The Anatolian argument has been proposed by the Russians Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, and by Colin Renfrew, who propose a link between the spread of Indo-European languages with the spread of agriculture from Anatolia into Europe (c. 7000 BCE).⁹⁸ Richard Frye (amongst others) questions the Anatolian theory, which is based on the existence of a large body of ancient texts in Hittite language discovered in Anatolia, on the basis that surely fourth and third millennium invaders from the Anatolian highlands would have been attracted south and then west, into the relatively wealthy and sedentary proto-states of the Fertile Crescent, rather than south and east to the Iranian plateau, Turkestan and beyond. If so, there should be overwhelming archaeological and literary evidence of their entry en masse into Mesopotamia at that time, but such evidence has thus far not come to light. Certainly stray bands of Indo-European speakers did make early incursions into Sumeria and Egypt, but no archaeological evidence, including pottery or decorative motifs, supports an Anatolian origin for the great bulk of Bronze Age Indo-European invaders.⁹⁹ The important point to note, however, is that both the Gimbutas and Renfrew models converge once the Indo-Europeans appear on the steppes. Indeed, whether the Proto-Indo-Europeans emerged firstly in Anatolia c. 7000 BCE or southern Russia and the Ukraine c. 5000 BCE, the end result was the same – 'an expansion of Indo-Iranian languages by way of Bronze Age elites moving south from the steppes'.¹⁰⁰

A third model has been proposed by Narain who suggests locating the original homeland of the Proto-Indo-Europeans much further to the east, perhaps in the Gansu region of western China itself. Narain disagrees strongly with Henning's argument for an original south Russian homeland for the Indo-Europeans and their migration

⁹⁵ I. V. Gamkrelidze and V. V. Ivanov, *Indoevropeskii Yazyk I indoevropetsi*, 2 vols. (Tbilisi 1984) pp. 828 and 888.

⁹⁶ A. K. Narain, 'On the "First" Indo-Europeans', *Papers on Inner Asia* 2 (Bloomington 1987) p. 28.

⁹⁷ See for example J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams, *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* (London and Chicago 1997).

⁹⁸ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁹⁹ Gamkrelidze and Ivanov *op. cit.*; and C. Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London 1989).

¹⁰⁰ Frye (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁰¹ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 130.

southeastwards via the Caucasus, although he does agree that the Indo-European migration must be placed earlier than a subsequent Indo-Iranian invasion on linguistic grounds.¹⁰¹ Indeed Narain claims that 'there is hardly any evidence to believe with Henning that they came from southern Russia in the Caucasus. On the other hand an alternative view takes us to the east'.¹⁰² Based on his interpretation of the theories of Gimbutas,¹⁰³ Narain argues that the Kurgan culture (in the sequence outlined above of Afanasevo, Andronovo and Karasuk) was not moving eastwards but *westward* in the third millennium, from southern Siberia and Kazakhstan into the Black Sea and Caucasus areas and eventually into Europe.¹⁰⁴ As such 'we should look ... for the home of the *first* Indo-Europeans in a more easterly rather than westerly direction'.¹⁰⁵ Narain has articulated this theory in a number of publications, sometimes tentatively – viz 'we should not exclude the possibility of a more easterly homeland for the Indo-Europeans in Inner Asia', or indeed that the Yuezhi-Tocharians had originated in Eastern Turkestan and lived in the Gansu 'speaking the archaic Indo-European language ... from unknown times';¹⁰⁶ and sometimes more forcefully – there are 'evident weaknesses and obvious presuppositions in the West-oriented theories on the Indo-Europeans'.¹⁰⁷

Narain refers to the research of Pulleyblank, Präsek and Andersson in support of his theory, but whilst all three offer indirect evidence that indicates the probability of a very lengthy tenure in the Gansu by the Indo-European proto-Yuezhi, none of their conclusions necessarily rule out an original western origin, nor a Middle Bronze Age date, for the migration of the ancestors of the Yuezhi to the east as members of the Afanasevo culture. In fact all three actually provide unintentional support for just such a scenario. Pulleyblank has consistently claimed a very lengthy occupation of the Gansu by the Yuezhi-Tocharians, and as early as 1966 was arguing for their presence in the region from the third millennium,¹⁰⁸ an argument not necessarily inconsistent with their arrival there *late* in that millennium. In 1971 Präsek suggested that 'there probably was no Indo-European invasion on the western frontiers of China in the early years of the first millennium BC' causing the barbarians to migrate either to the west or to the northwest, for the single reason that the Indo-Europeans had been there *since time immemorial*.¹⁰⁹

But Präsek's focus was on archaeological evidence of barbarian invasions 'in the early years of the first millenium' BCE, that is up to ten centuries *later* than the possible arrival of Indo-European Afanasevo groups from the Altai-Yenisei region to the north, as proposed by Mallory and Mair. Nor is Andersson's 1943 conclusion that 'there was a remarkable continuity in the development of the ceramic art of the

¹⁰¹ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹⁰³ See in particular M. Gimbutas, 'The Indo-Europeans: Archaeological Problems', *American Anthropologist*, 65 (1963) pp. 815-836.

¹⁰⁴ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ A. K. Narain, 'Indo-Europeans in Inner Asia', in D. Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge 1990) pp. 153-4.

¹⁰⁷ A. K. Narain, 'From the Ordos to the Oxus: The Tocharians and their Odyssey', presented as the sixth Professor H. D. Sankalia Memorial Lecture at the XIV Annual Conference of the Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies (New Delhi, 24-26 November 1996).

¹⁰⁸ Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, pp. 9-39.

¹⁰⁹ J. Präsek, *Chinese States and the Northern Barbarians in the Period 1400-300 B.C.* (Dordrecht 1971) p. 22.

Gansu during two thousand years from 2500-500 BC" particularly convincing, in that both his chronology and sequence have been substantially revised and even discounted by a number of contemporary Chinese archaeologists, as noted above.¹¹⁰ Narain is surely correct in his general conclusion (that the Yuezhi/Tocharians had dwelt in the Gansu for a very long time indeed), but is perhaps limiting the timeframe of a possible arrival from the west by suggesting that Andersson's claim proves that 'there is no evidence of distinctly foreign intrusion'.¹¹¹ In the period after the mid- to late-second millennium BCE, this is undoubtedly true, but is not necessarily so for up to several centuries earlier, i.e. late in the third or early in the second millennium.

A further component of Narain's theory is a linguistic argument based on the suggestion that the Tocharian language (the language probably spoken by the Yuezhi) is the 'oldest' Indo-European language known. Richard Frye disputes this core assumption: 'In regard to the Tocharian language, the adjective "oldest" is manifestly wrong since the body of sources in the Hittite and other Indo-European languages is much older than the Tocharian remains'.¹¹² Mallory and Mair are also critical of Narain's theory and the interpretation of limited archaeological and linguistic evidence upon which it is based, although their claim that 'seldom has a tail so small wagged a dog so large' is unjustified in a field where careful analysis of scarce evidence is often the only available course of enquiry.¹¹³ While the archaeological evidence of Indo-European Bronze Age migrations has already been examined in some detail in this chapter, any attempt to consider this linguistic evidence and the philological theories associated with it, will be facilitated by a brief introduction to the range and branches of Indo-European languages, and a consideration of the claims of greater antiquity made for Tocharian by Professor Narain.

IV

Linguistic Evidence for the Origins of the Yuezhi

Identification of the Yuezhi as Tocharian Speakers

It has long been assumed that the Yuezhi spoke the Indo-European branch language of 'Tocharian', at least during the period of their residency in the Gansu. Narain, reflecting their widely-used appellation in a range of ancient sources, refers to the Yuezhi exclusively as the 'Tokharians', identifying both the dynasty and its people by their language.¹¹⁴ Variations on the name 'Tocharian' are found in texts in several Inner and Outer Asian languages including Indian, Sakan, Turkish, Persian, Chinese and Greek, as will be shown below. As noted above, it is the mention of several variants of the name 'Tocharian' in the Greek accounts in particular that provides crucial evidence identifying the Tocharians with the Yuezhi. The second century CE Greek geographer Ptolemy, for example, offers five separate mentions of Tocharian-variant peoples, located in different times and places and with different spellings. These locations are closely identifiable with Chinese accounts of the route of the migration of the Yuezhi to Bactria that began in 162 BCE. Ptolemy himself did not

¹¹⁰ Andersson (1943) *op. cit.* See Narain (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹¹¹ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹¹² Frye (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹¹³ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹¹⁴ See the title of Narain's latest study *The Tokharians* (2000) *op. cit.*, for example.

see the link and thought he was describing five different nomadic groups without suspecting, as Tarn put it, that he was actually recording 'the odyssey of one and the same people ... this odyssey is that of the Yuezhi as given by the Chinese sources, and it makes the identity of Tochari and Yuezhi certain'.¹⁵

With a link between the Yuezhi and Tocharian firmly (if not absolutely) established, a wide range of significant philological and textual evidence becomes available as further evidence. But the identification of the Yuezhi as Tocharian-speaking is by no means universally agreed upon. Mallory and Mair, for example, are quite correct in stating that 'as for the Yuezhi, there is no firm evidence from any Chinese source as to the language they spoke'.¹⁶ Any attempt to confirm the link must begin with a consideration of the greater family of Indo-European languages, and the role of Tocharian within that superstructure. Such an analysis might not necessarily allow any absolute identification of the Yuezhi as Tocharian-speakers, but does potentially shed further light on the date of their probable arrival in the Gansu, and the extent of their realm.

Indo-European Languages

Indo-European is defined as 'a family of languages, issuing from a common language, which have become differentiated by gradual separation'.¹⁷ It is this differentiation through separation that makes the Indo-European languages so significant to comparative philologists (and historians), since the various branches of the family have been located over a great geographical area stretching from the Atlantic to Central Asia, and have been in use for a period of some four millennia. This has resulted in Indo-European assuming the position of the largest and most widely diffused linguistic family in the world, often at the expense of other non-Indo-European languages which it has obliterated in its relentless spread over four thousand years.¹⁸ The concept of 'Indo-European' is primarily a linguistic one, and the fact that philologists and historians have been able to extend this understanding to include other aspects of the civilisation of various Indo-European-speaking peoples is due almost solely to language. In particular, Indo-European allows philologists the opportunity to explore 'genetic' linguistic relationships through the creation of a model of the correspondence relationships that delimit various branches, reconstructing their earlier stages in the hope of identifying the initial root of all Indo-European languages.

This research is generally undertaken in two opposed but essentially complementary directions. One method is to create reconstructions using phonemes, whole words or inflections that can be compared between various languages in the hope of identifying a common prototype. Another is to start with a well-established Indo-European form and trace the variety of forms that seem to be descended from it. It has also long been recognised by philologists that correspondences between the vocabularies of various Indo-European languages provide evidence of 'the principal areas of a common culture, particularly of material culture'.¹⁹ Examples of these lexical

¹⁵ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge 1938, reprint 1951) p. 517.

¹⁶ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁷ Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (London 1973) p. 9.

¹⁸ W. B. Lockwood, *Indo-European Philology* (London 1969) p. 188.

¹⁹ Benveniste *op. cit.*, p. 10.

correspondences have been collected over a great range of subjects, including family relationships, number, animal names, meter and formulae, and have been published in extensive lexicographic and comparative Indo-European grammars of the early twentieth century. Indo-European languages are divided into several major branches: Asian or Indo-Iranian, Hittite-Phrygian, Illyrian, Venetic, Albanian, Hellenic, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, Baltic and Slavonic, as well as Tocharian.

In classifying the various Indo-European languages, a crucial difference was found as early as the nineteenth century, between the languages of the east (notably Sanskrit and Avestan in Asia and those of the west (Celtic, Germanic and Italic in Europe). This difference was in the area of 'palatization' – the use of a hard *g* or *k* in western branches, replaced by a softer *j*, *z* or *s* in Sanskrit and other eastern branches. Philologists came to term those languages without the softer palatized forms as *centum* languages (from Latin *centum* 'for a hundred') and those with palatization as *satem* (from the Sanskrit word for a hundred, *satam*, or Avestan *satom*). In general no *centum* languages were found east of the *satem* branches before the discovery of Tocharian.

Tocharian

Archaeological discoveries made at the turn of the twentieth century at Tarim Basin oasis sites near modern Kucha, Karashahr and Turfan brought to light a large amount of manuscript material, some of it in a hitherto unknown language. Altogether some 3,640 pages or fragments of Tocharian (as it became known) have been recovered from the sands of the Taklamakan, and the number of known Tocharian words runs to almost 5,000.¹²¹ These texts were essentially religious (Buddhist and some Manichaean scriptures) in nature, although they included a few commercial manuscripts. The literary religious texts were mostly written on palm leaves while the commercial material, consisting of monastery correspondence, accounts and caravan 'permits', was written on tablets. The texts were written in a version of the Indian syllabic script of Brahmi, and the language of the manuscript fragments was identified as an Indo-European branch and named 'Tocharian' by as early as 1908.¹²² The decipherment of the texts, and their identification as Indo-European, was facilitated by finds of bilingual texts in both Sanskrit and Tocharian.

¹²⁰ See for example, A. Meillet, *Les dialectes indo-européens* (Paris 1908), J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern 1949), G. Devoto, *Origini indoeuropee* (Florence 1963).

¹²¹ See for example D.Q. Adams, 'The position of Tocharian amongst the other Indo-European languages', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, pp. 395-402, and D.Q. Adams, *A Dictionary of Tocharian B* (Amsterdam 1999).

¹²² For an overview of the history of attempts to determine the linguistic affinities of Tocharian and the identity of its speakers see, amongst others, P. Pelliot, 'Tokharien et Koutcheen', in *Journal Asiatique* (1934) pp. 23-106; T. Burrow, 'Tocharian Elements in the Karashahr Documents from Chinese Turkestan', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1935) pp. 667-675; H.W. Bailey, 'Recent Work in "Tocharian"', in *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1947) pp. 126-153; W.B. Henning, 'The Name of the "Tokharian" Language', in *Asia Major* (1949/50) pp. 158-62; G.S. Lane, 'Tocharian: Indo-European and Non-Indo-European Relationships', in G. Cardona *et al.*, eds., *Indo-European and Indo-Europeanity: Papers Presented at the Third Indo-European Conference at the University of Pennsylvania* (Univ. of Pennsylvania 1970) pp. 73-88; A.J. van Windekens, *Le Tokharien* vol. 1 (Louvain 1976).

Somewhat surprisingly, considering the eastern geographic location of the discoveries, Tocharian was found to bear a close affinity to the *centum* group of Indo-European languages, rather than with the *satem* group that included the Indic and Iranian languages of the geographically contiguous areas. Tocharian is clearly a non-palatalizing language, the word for hundred being *kant* in Tocharian A, or *kante* in Tocharian B. (Of course the discovery of a *centum* branch east of the *satem* variants is not at all surprising if one allows for the possibility of an early migration by the *centum*-speaking Indo-Europeans, including groups from the Afanasevo culture, to the Tarim Basin).

The new language was named 'Tocharian' on the basis of a variation of that word discovered in a Turkic Uighur colophon of a Buddhist text. Subsequent to that initial identification, the discovery of a similar word in Sanskrit (*Tokharika* for 'a woman of Kucha') in a bilingual Sanskrit-Tocharian text confirmed the earlier designation.¹²² The manuscripts seemed to fall into two considerably differentiated dialects, so different in fact that, as Lockwood puts it, 'one could almost speak of separate languages' - Tocharian 'A' and 'B' - although both are found along the northern 'Silk Roads' route of the Tarim Basin from Bezaqlik in the east to Maralbesu (Bachu) in the west.¹²⁴

Tocharian A is generally identified with manuscripts discovered near Turpan and Qarashahar in the east, and was probably 'a dead liturgical language preserved in monasteries'.¹²⁵ Tocharian B documents are found across the entire northern Tarim region, and it was apparently a more vernacular, everyday language, used for both religious and commercial purposes. In addition to the two principal variants, certain Kharosthi documents discovered at southern Tarim route sites including Shanshan and Lou Lan - the ancient territory of Kroran (hence the designation 'Kroranian') - contain sufficient linguistic elements of Tocharian to allow it almost to be identified as a third distinctive dialect.¹²⁶ The oldest examples of Tocharian A and B so far discovered are from the seventh and eighth centuries CE, while the Kroranian documents of Shanshan might be datable to as early as the third century CE. There is thus a significant time lag between both the possible pre- and proto-historical, and the 'historically attested', occupations of the Gansu by the Yuezhi/Tocharians (early second millennium BCE - 162 BCE) and the datable evidence of Tocharian. But Narain, Tarn and most other Yuezhi researchers are surely correct in claiming that 'the consensus of scholarly opinion identifies the Yuezhi with the Tocharians' (i.e. with the people who spoke Tocharian).¹²⁷

However it is more difficult to agree with Narain's suggestion that the Tocharian language is one of, if not *the*, oldest Indo-European language known.¹²⁸ Noting the

¹²² Narain (1990) *op. cit.* p. 152. See Bailey (1947) *op. cit.* pp. 126-53; H.W. Bailey, 'Tokharika', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London 1970) pp. 121-4; V.S. Vorob'ev-Desjatovskij, 'Pis'ma iz centralno-aziat'skoj pis'mennosti', *I ZIGI* 16 (1958) pp. 280-308.

¹²³ Lockwood *op. cit.* p. 38.

¹²⁴ Narain (1990) *op. cit.* p. 152.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 153; Narain (2000) *op. cit.* p. 9.

¹²⁶ Narain (1990) *op. cit.* p. 153.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 154.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 154.

possible evidence of a link between Tocharian and Hittite.¹²⁹ He suggests that the two languages

... could have separated from the parent speech earlier than, and independent of, the rest of the Indo-European family. In view of the linguistic antiquity of Hittite, it is possible that it might have been the starting stage of the Indo-European language family, and consequently should be dismissed out of hand.¹³⁰

Narain then uses this philological chronology to support his ethnographic theory outlined above, that the original homeland of the Yuezhi could be located close to western China. The major problem with this argument for Frye (amongst others) is his firm belief that 'Hittite and other Indo-European languages (are) much older than the Tocharian remains'.¹³¹ Tocharian contains many extraneous linguistic elements',¹³² and even Narain agrees that there is a 'remarkable influx of loan words from various ... non-Indo-European languages'.¹³³ Whilst Narain is quite correct to interpret this influx as due at least in part to the intense levels of trans-cultural interaction that occurred in 'corridor' regions like the Gansu and along the northern and southern Tarim Basin branches of the 'Silk Roads',¹³⁴ the presence of so many extraneous linguistic elements might also be interpreted as evidence of a relatively late dating for Tocharian. As such, while not necessarily disproving Narain's argument, if the presence of so many 'extraneous elements' is evidence of a later date for the development of the Tocharian branch, this in turn allows for an earlier south Russian homeland for the 'first' Indo-Europeans in general, and of the Bronze Age Indo-European invaders of Central Asia in particular. It is also consistent with a subsequent interim residency in the Altai Yenisei region by successive waves of these nomads, including perhaps the proto-Tocharians.

It should be noted, however, that Mallory and Mair also argue for an earlier rather than later dating for Tocharian, based on the lack of any special genetic relationship with Indo-Iranian. They imagine the Indo-Iranian language stock forming sometime between c. 2500-2000 BCE 'somewhere in the east European or west Asiatic steppe, i.e. between the Ukraine and western Kazakhstan'.¹³⁵ As such, the antecedents of the Tocharian language must not have been a part of this Indo-Iranian nucleus, but of an earlier Indo-European branch. The matter of dating aside, their conclusion still supports the contention of this book that the ancestors of the Tocharians/Yuezhi might be sought amongst the Middle Bronze Age, Indo-European-speaking Afanasevo culture which migrated from south Russia to the Altai-Yenesei region in the early to mid-3rd Millennium BCE, prior to the arrival of Indo-Iranian groups associated with the Andronovo culture.

¹²⁹ For a brief and informative discussion on the discovery and various forms of Hittite, see O.R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Harmondsworth 1969) pp. 117-31.

¹³⁰ Narain (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹³¹ Frye (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹³² See, for example, Lockwood *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹³³ Narain (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 293.

The Guti as Proto-Yuezhi?

Henning contended that the ancestors of the Yuezhi-Tocharians must have set out on their migration (from south Russia) earlier than the Indo-Iranians because Indo-Iranian was a more 'highly developed' (and therefore later) form of Indo-European, an argument that would probably find little support amongst philologists today.¹³⁶ Henning further attempted to identify the Yuezhi (on linguistic grounds) with two Indo-European tribes who originally migrated south and west, from north of the Caucasus, into Sumeria. They are known from Akkadian and Babylonian sources as the 'Guti' and 'Tukri', and Henning found a hint in the personal names of the Guti kings of a Tocharian connection.¹³⁷ He equates the Guti (which later became 'Kuci' and hence Kuchean) with Tocharian 'B', and the Tukri with Tocharian 'A'.¹³⁸

Henning's presumption of a link between two names found in Akkadian documents and names found over two thousand years later in the Tarim Basin has not found general support. None the less the territories occupied by both the Guti and Tukri were included in a list of the dominions of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2371-2316 BCE), and also in a later inscription of Hammurabi of Babylon, both of which clearly indicate that the Guti and Tukri were of external origin, or foreigners.¹³⁹ Indeed both 'peoples' (among others in Hammurabi's list) are noted as speaking languages described as *egru*, variously translated as 'queer',¹⁴⁰ 'intricate'¹⁴¹ or 'complicated'.¹⁴² This suggests that both the Guti and Tukri may well have been Indo-European invaders who had migrated into South West Asia sometime in the mid-third millennium BCE. Later Naram-sin (2291-2255),¹⁴³ one of the great conquerors of Babylonian history, suffered a defeat at the hands of the Guti, who then ruled Babylon for over a century until their last king Tirigan was overthrown and killed by Utu-hegal of Uruk.¹⁴⁴ The later descendants of the Guti figured in the campaigns of Assyrian kings near the end of the 2nd Millennium,¹⁴⁵ and remnants were noted as slaves being sold in market where the 'light colour' of their skin (described as *namru*, although this word might also be translated to mean 'bright' or 'intelligent') was commented upon.¹⁴⁶ Thereafter the Guti disappeared from the records.

Henning suggested that perhaps following the fall of Tirigan, the Guti and Tukri - his 'Proto-Tocharians' - migrated out of South West Asia and re-located initially in Iran before being forced further east where they invaded and settled in a substantial area which included most of Xinjiang and the Gansu.¹⁴⁷ When eventually the Yuezhi were

¹³⁶ Henning *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹³⁹ C. J. Gadd, 'The Dynasty of Agade and Gutian Invasions', in F. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd and N. G. L. Hammond, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 1* (Cambridge 1971) pp. 417-463, 495-643, esp. p. 433 for Sargon's list, and pp. 624 and 639 for Hammurabi's list.

¹⁴⁰ Henning *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁴¹ F. A. Speiser, 'Hurrians and Subarians', *JAOIS* (1948) pp. 1-13, 7a, 8a.

¹⁴² I. Gelb, 'Hurrians and Subarians', (*Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization No. 22*) (Chicago 1944) p. 41.

¹⁴³ Gadd *op. cit.*, pp. 440-45.

¹⁴⁴ I. Jacobsen, 'The Sumerian King List', (*The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago Syrological Studies No. 11*) (Chicago 1939) p. 139, n. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Gadd *op. cit.*, p. 444.

¹⁴⁶ Henning *op. cit.*, p. 220; Speiser *op. cit.*, p. 12 ff.

¹⁴⁷ Henning *op. cit.*, pp. 220-1.

forced to return west in 162 BCE (after their defeat by the Xiongnu) they set out again in the general direction of Persia (Iran) but 'came to a halt in Bactria, possibly due memory had been preserved among them of a pleasant land far to the west whence their ancestors had come'.¹⁴⁹ Henning's reconstruction was of course highly speculative, and his proposed identification of the Yuezhi with the Guts based mainly on a perceived philological link between the two Chinese characters that were fixed as standard orthographs for the name **Gut-ti-ti* by 200 BCE. Henning claims that these characters are pronounced as 'Yue-zhi' in modern Mandarin, and the rest of his reconstructed narrative 'history' then followed from that one tentative equation.¹⁵⁰ But the pronunciation of the morphosyllables that are pronounced as 'Yuezhi' are now more commonly reconstructed as **ngwat-tieg* than **Gut-ti-ti*, making any link far less transparent. Frye considers the Gut and the Tocharians to have been two different Indo-European groups. While noting that a few Gut words preserved in cuneiform texts 'have been attached to the Tocharian language', Frye considers this link to be by no means clearly established.¹⁵¹ If both the Gut and the Tocharians did speak a *centum* Indo-European language, then there is some evidence to regard them as linguistic relatives, and both groups probably migrated south from a shared original south Russian homeland. However, whilst both the Gut and Tocharians may have been amongst those groups who went initially south, the former continued into South West Asia whilst the latter turned east towards, as Frye suggests, Xinjiang.¹⁵²

Conclusion

The most that can be said of the evidence for the Yuezhi provided by this brief consideration of Indo-European languages, then, is that if one accepts a link between the Yuezhi dynasty and Tocharian, as well as a probable pre-Indo-Iranian origin for Tocharian, this offers further tentative evidence supporting the location of the ancestors of the Yuezhi amongst the Indo-European-speaking (Afanasevo?) pastoral nomads who migrated from southern Russia to the Altai-Yenisei region in the early to mid third millennium BCE. Sometime later (early – second millennium?) they migrated again (probably as a result of pressure exerted by the arrival of Indo-Iranian-speaking pastoral nomads associated with the Andronovo culture) into the Gansu and Tarim Basin.

The single most important aspect of Indo-European from a world historian's perspective, however, is the sheer spread of this dominant language group. Most languages associated with hunter-gatherers are very small and localised. How could one such language (which emerged as hunter-gatherer groups were making the transition to agriculture and animal domestication c. 5000 BCE) spread so widely? The obvious explanation is that nomadic pastoralists acted as a powerful carrier, spreading the language west, south and east during the Bronze Age migrations. There is thus a strong reason for regarding the earliest horse-riding cultures (for which the paradigm site is Dereivka, excavated by Telegin) as the first Indo-European-speaking cultures, as Mallory has tentatively suggested.¹⁵³ And as the modern Russian

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-8.

¹⁵¹ Frye (1996) *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁵³ Mallory *op. cit.* pp. 198, 201-2, 234-6. For Dereivka see D.Y. Telegin, *Dereivka* (Oxford BAR International Series 287, 1986).

Kazakhstan border happens to cut across lands which may have been the regions in which the earliest horse-riding cultures emerged. Frye makes sense (as had Mallory earlier) in nominating both south Russia and Kazakhstan as the location of the original homeland of the first Indo-Europeans.¹⁴¹ The *centum*-speaking Indo-Europeans, Frye argues, were the first to migrate further south from this broad homeland – the Hittites (and later the Gutti and Tukri) into Anatolia, the Tocharians into Xinjiang (eventually) and others onto the Iranian plateau and beyond. The Indo-Iranians then followed some time later, presumably absorbing the *centum*-speakers or forcing them to move on.

Frye hoped that this simple theory might put to rest 'a few of the enigmas regarding the earliest movement of Indo-Europeans',¹⁴² but given the history and tenuous evidence associated with the question of the original source of both Indo-European language and culture, that is hardly likely. At least with an analysis of literary references to the Tocharians and Yuezhi, the debate is able to move onto somewhat more solid ground, although here again the evidence is hardly conclusive and remains open to a range of interpretations. None the less it is in this direction that any comprehensive attempt to determine the origin of the Yuezhi must next proceed.

V

Early Textual Evidence for the Yuezhi

If one accepts the identification of the Yuezhi with Tocharian, this opens a surprisingly wide range of textual sources that provide confirmation of the significance of the Yuezhi/Tocharians in the proto- and early-historic period of ancient Central Asian history. These sources include Greek geographies, the classical Indian epics of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, Tibetan and Khotanese Sakan scripts, Turkish Manichaean and Buddhist texts, and even Persian manuscripts. Chronologically however, the first textual evidence for the Yuezhi/Tocharians is provided in the Annals of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty, the *Yi Zhou Shu*. The significance of the Zhou Annals, and indeed of all the early textual references to the Yuezhi, is greatly enhanced by considering those references in their historical framework, and it is in that context that they are presented below.

Introduction to the Pre- and Early Dynastic History of China

Until the twentieth century very little was known about Chinese civilisation before the first millennium BCE, apart from shadowy mythical histories. These myths mentioned an (possibly Longshan) Emperor who founded a warlike state in c. 2700 BCE, as well as a 'Xia' Dynasty founded in c. 2000 BCE, based on irrigation agriculture and warfare. Archaeological excavations, particularly in the Anyang region of Henan province, have since provided solid evidence for the existence of both the Xia and subsequent Shang Dynasties. Xia and Shang sites are located on earlier Neolithic 'Longshan' settlements along the Yellow River Valley, indicating the presence of powerful competing chiefdoms living in walled central towns, similar to the early city-states of Sumer. The semi-mythical Xia Dynasty, which was founded

by 'Yu the Great' ('Lamer of the Waters') and which supposedly invented metallurgy, may have endured from the beginning of the second millennium until as late as 1600 BCE.

By 1600 there seems to have emerged a single ruling dynasty, the Shang, which lasted until c. 1050 BCE and was based at Anyang. The Shang dynasty might best be described as a loosely unified confederacy of competing small kingdoms in which the power of the Shang kings was far from universally accepted. The Shang kingdoms were based on large armies mobilised through elaborate systems of kinship: there is evidence of well-equipped military forces, large-scale warfare and the mass slaughter of captives.¹⁵⁵ However the dynasty also produced well-crafted bronze food and drinking vessels and musical instruments, as well as weapons and chariots and a sophisticated form of writing.¹⁵⁶ What is particularly remarkable about the cultural achievements of the Shang is that they seemed to spring into existence without any period of apparent apprenticeship, and in particular their bronze-casting techniques demonstrate an astonishing degree of skill and sophistication.¹⁵⁷ More recently, however, (as mentioned above) excavations at Erlitou have gone some way towards providing a 'missing link' between the Neolithic and early dynastic periods of Chinese proto-history.¹⁵⁸

Soon after 1100 BCE the Shang Dynasty appears to have collapsed and been replaced by rulers known as the Zhou who had originated in the thirteenth century in northwestern China, and had once been western vassals of the Shang. The long Zhou Dynastic era which, because of its longevity was a vital formative period in Chinese history, can be divided into three distinct periods: the Early (or Western) Zhou (c. 1050-771 BCE), the Middle (or Eastern) Zhou (771-473) and the Late Zhou (or 'Period of the Warring States' (473-256).¹⁵⁹ The Western Zhou moved the centre of political gravity towards their homeland in the Wei Valley, near modern Xian, and created an empire larger than that of the Shang. Initially the Zhou kings maintained a strong and centralised hold on the country, but by the eighth century their power had declined greatly and despite attempts to reform the dynasty at the new capital of Loyang, the Eastern Zhou were forced to give up centralised control to a series of perhaps as many as 200 competing city-states in a satrapy system. Most of the bronzes of the Western Zhou uncovered by Chinese archaeologists come from caches deposited in 771 BCE during the crisis that forced the Zhou sovereigns to abandon their capital and bring an end to their dynasty. The capital was then transferred to Henan, but the stability that had marked the Western Zhou era had disappeared, and

¹⁵⁵ For an introduction to the Shang see for example: Kwang-chih Chang, *Shang Civilization* (Berkeley 1980); and D.N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Los Angeles 1978).

¹⁵⁶ See Debanne-Francfort *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67.

¹⁵⁷ W. Watson, *Ancient China: The Discoveries of Post-Liberation Archaeology* (New York 1974) p. 35.

¹⁵⁸ On Erlitou see Debanne-Francfort *op. cit.*, pp. 55-58. See also Zhang Yuzhong, 'Early Bronzes Discovered in Xinjiang', *CIAA* No. 15 (June 2002) pp. 17-21, which documents recent archaeological discoveries of very early bronze artefacts in Xinjiang. Zhang notes on p. 17 that 'in the southern Tianshan area on the lower reach of the Kongque river in the Luopu region, some bronze threads and foils (fragments) in the tombs at Gumugou ... have been carbon-dated to 3800 BP'. In addition, a variety of unearthed bronze cauldrons have been attributed to the Sakas and Xiongnu, and dated anywhere from the seventh to the first centuries BCE.

¹⁵⁹ L. Carrington Goodrich, *A Short History of the Chinese People* (New York 1959) p. 18, n. 10.

up until the founding of the Qin Dynasty in 221, chaos and conflict characterised Chinese history.

Yet despite (or perhaps because of) this, the Middle (or Eastern) Zhou period in particular (771-473 BCE) was an era of dynamic technological and cultural achievement. The development of extensive irrigation-based agriculture led to a commercial boom and the first use of coinage, while the humanist philosophy of Confucius (c. 551-479 BCE) and the Taoist ideology of Laozu also dates from this period. The Zhou Era in Chinese history must thus be characterised as an age of dynamic growth and tremendous creative energy. Arguably it was the very lack of centralised authority and the multiplicity of rival states that acted as stimuli to this exciting phase of Chinese history. The Late Zhou was defined by the growing strength of two contending royal houses, the Chu (who absorbed the powerful Yue) in the south, and the Qin in the north, and the resulting tumultuous struggle for supremacy is accurately described as the 'Period of the Warring States'. The Qin emerged victorious in 221 BCE, and Qin Shi Huangdi immediately instigated a series of radical reforms – establishing strong centralised control, dividing his territory into administrative districts run by civil servants paid by the central government, building roads, simplifying the writing system, standardising weights and measures and connecting, repairing and extending the great defensive walls originally constructed during the 'Warring States' period. It was Huangdi who had constructed the renowned vast mausoleum, which housed thousands of terracotta warriors aligned in eleven rows more than 200 metres long.¹⁶⁰ The death of Qin Shi Huangdi led to another period of chaos until the short-lived Qin Dynasty was brought to an end in 206 BCE when a rebel peasant, Liu Bang, founded the Han Dynasty and restored the feudal system.

Other suggestions (besides the lack of central authority and consequent competition between states) have been made to explain the astonishing burst of creativity associated with the Middle and Late Zhou, including the influence of Indo-European nomads through a vigorous trans-Eurasian cultural exchange. Certainly world historians have long recognised that contact between different peoples is almost inevitably a catalyst for change and innovation, and archaeological evidence of the Bronze Age migrations would suggest that from the middle- to late - third millennium BCE Indo-European pastoral nomads may have had contact with the incipient Chinese civilisation. Gimbutas argued this as early as 1963 when she claimed that Indo-Europeans must have been

... on or within the present boundaries of China already in the third millennium ... they would have been there by the latter part of the second millennium when the Shang civilization was emerging. The probability that there were contacts with the emergent civilization of China is (therefore) surely very great ...¹⁶¹

Given this chronology, these Indo-Europeans must probably have included groups from the Afanasevo culture, but as indicated above, whilst speculation on the possible influence of pastoral nomads on the development of Chinese civilisation is intriguing, it is largely outside the scope of this paper.¹⁶² Such interaction would have been a

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 93-99. See also Li Xueqin, trans. K.C. Chang, *Eastern Zhou and Qin Civilizations* (1985).

¹⁶¹ Gimbutas (1963) *op. cit.*, pp. 813-36.

¹⁶² Larosset (1959) *op. cit.* includes a list of western and Indo-European cultural traits that may have been incorporated into Chinese culture between c. 2000-1000 BCE, p. 140.

mixed blessing in any case. There is no doubt, for example, that by the Late Zhou period the Chinese military had benefited from contact with militarised nomads, by adopting trousers and cavalry techniques from the 'barbarians' to the north, but this increased contact also made the nomads more dangerous and envious of Chinese goods, with the result that the Zhou and subsequent Chinese dynasties were forced to devote considerable resources to their northern borders. The construction of the 'Great Walls' and of northern defence systems in general subsequently became the central focus of Chinese foreign policy preoccupations throughout the Qin and early-Han Dynastic eras.

References to the Yuezhi in the Zhou Annals

What are of most relevance here, however, are apparent references to the Yuezhi in the historical annals of the Zhou Dynasty. In 1937 Haloun drew attention to a variety of forms of the name 'Yuezhi' in the Zhou texts.¹⁶¹ Despite (correctly) dismissing Haloun's conclusion that the Yuezhi were actually Scythians, both Pulleyblank and Henning subsequently agreed with his identification of the references, which indicated that the Yuezhi-Tocharian were probably known to the Chinese at least several centuries before the Han Annals were written, from sometime early in the seventh century BCE at least.¹⁶² The most important references to the Yuezhi are as follows:¹⁶³

a. Yi Zhou Shu Chapter 59, 'Wang Hui'

'At the meeting of Cheng Zhou ... the king (Cheng) stands (on the platform) facing towards the south ... Tang Zhu, Xun Zhu and Duke Zhou stand by his left, and Tangong Wang by his right ... To the north of the platform ... (among those envoys who line up) in the west wing stand ... the Yuzhi people with *taotu*.'

With the exception of 'Yuzhi', all other names in this passage are personal names. *Taotu* is a type of wild horse, making the identification of sections of the 'Yuzhi'/'Yuezhi' as pastoral nomads whose representatives would be expected to arrive at a meeting with the Zhou king accompanied by their steppe ponies more likely. In fact elements of the Yuezhi might also have been involved in horse trading, as will be considered below. Also worth noting is the 'geographical' placement of the envoys on the 'platform'. The Zhu, who were based in southern China along (and to the north of) the Yangtze and Kiang River Valleys, stood to the south of the platform, and the Yuzhi to the north west, an accurate (though symbolic) representation of location of their homeland in the Gansu.

b. Yi Zhou Shu, in 'Yiyin chaoxian', from the Shangshu (Appendix to Chapter 59):

'(The King Tang orders Yiyin) to come up with advice on (the matter of) paying tributes by the peoples of the four quarters. (Yiyin thus says): As for those on the north (including) Kongtong, Daxia, Shaju, Gula, Danlue, Baohu, Dandi, Xiongnu,

¹⁶¹ G. Haloun, 'Zur Ue-ist Frage', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 91 (Leipzig 1937), pp. 243-318.

¹⁶² Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19; Henning (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁶³ A comprehensive list of the references to the Yuezhi in the *Yi Zhou Shu* can be found in Naram (2000) *op. cit.* pp. 4-5. In Endnote 10 (p. 17) Professor Naram thanks Professor Tsai Fu-Cheng for the excellent translations. Italics in the Zhou references contained in this chapter are largely mine.

Leitan, *Yuechi*, Qianli, Qilong and Long Hu, I request to let them bring in camels, white fades, and wild horses, *taotu*, *juen* and good bows for tributes.

Tang was the first king of the Shang Dynasty, who ruled from c. 1600 BCE. The story is probably apocryphal, but even the suggestion that the Yuezhi might already have been in occupation of a region along China's north (western) frontier as early as the seventh century of the second millennium BCE is intriguing, and consistent with the general time frame of an arrival in the Gansu sometime around or soon after c. 2000 BCE. The tributes requested are exactly what would be expected from a dynasty of militarised pastoral nomadic ancestry – camels, horses and bows. The inclusion of camels is perhaps a further link with the Dunhuang region of the Gansu and the Tarim Basin beyond, making the location of the Yuezhi along China's north (western) border even more plausible.

Like *taotu*, the *juen* was another kind of 'wild' horse renowned for its speed. Xinru Liu has argued that the Yuezhi were probably great dealers in jade, camels and steppe ponies such as *taotu* and *juen*.¹⁶⁶ Although later than the Zhou period references under discussion here, it is worth noting that Sima Qian mentions a chief named Luo of the *Wuzhi* (Yuezhi?) who, during the reign of the first emperor of the Qin (Huangdi r. 246–210 BCE), was a successful intermediary in both the jade and horse trade markets:

'Wuzhi Luo raised domestic animals, and when he had a large number, he sold them and brought rare silks and other articles which he secretly sent to the king of the Rong barbarians. The king of Rong repaid him ten times the original cost and sent him domestic animals until Wuzhi Luo had so many herds of horses and cattle he could only estimate their number roughly by the valleyful. The First Emperor of the Qin ordered that Wuzhi Luo be granted the same honours as a feudal lord and allowed him to join the ministers in seasonal audiences at court'.¹⁶⁷

Whether Luo was chief of one of the tribes in the greater Yuezhi confederation is impossible to prove, but if he was this passage offers further evidence of the activity of elements of the Yuezhi in providing a number of essential items to the early dynastic courts of China, particularly jade (as will be discussed below) and horses. And their reputation as horse traders may have continued until as late as the third century CE. Xinru Liu also mentions a reference in a (now lost) Sogdian source of that period which stated: 'The Yuezhi are famous for their numerous horses'. The quote was apparently included by a Tang scholar who annotated Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji*, but this is impossible to verify.¹⁶⁸

c. *Mu Tianzi zhuan*, Chapter 1:

On the day of *rao* the king travelled westwards. Thereafter he crossed the pass and the slope of Yu. On the day of *shui* he arrived at Yanju, the flat land of the *Yuzhi*.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ As argued in Xinru Liu, 'Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi – Kushan Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies', *Journal of World History* (Taiwan, Fall 2001), Vol. 12, pp. 261ff.

¹⁶⁷ Sima Qian, *Shi Ji* 129, trans. B. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian by Sima Qian – Han Dynasty II*, p. 440.

¹⁶⁸ *Europe*, cit.

¹⁶⁹ Translation by T. F. Cheng, 'The Travels of Emperor Mu', *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 164 (1932) pp. 124–49 (esp. p. 138); see also R. Mathieu, *Le Mu* (Paris, 1978).

The Chinese ruler thus travelled a long way to the west, and after negotiating the 'slope' and crossing the pass of Yu, arrived at the flat pastoral and arable land of the Yuzhi. Again, the direction and general description of the geographical landscape fits squarely with the Gansu Corridor. The most impressive pass in the Gansu is the Jiayuguan Pass, which stands between the snow-capped Qilian Mountains to the south and the black highlands of the Mazong Mountains to the north. Laozi was supposed to have crossed the pass in the fifth century BCE, at the age of somewhere between 160 and 200.¹⁷ Distilled by the rejection of his teachings he rode his black buffalo across Jiayuguan and disappeared into the Taklamakan. The account of the Zhou king crossing that same pass may well be apocryphal, but the reference to crossing the Pass of Yu to attain the homeland of the Yuzhi also seems to indicate reasonably accurate Chinese knowledge of the location of the Indo-Europeans.

There are also several references to the Yuezhi (referred to as 'Yuzhi' or 'Nuzhi') in the *Guanzi*, most relating to their apparent association with the supply of jade to the Zhou (and earlier Shang) Courts. The *Guanzi* is purported to be the work of Zhou economist Guan Zhong (fl. c. 645 BCE):¹⁸

d. *Guanzi* Chapter 73, 'Guoxu':

'Jade is brought out from *Yuzhi*, gold from the Ru River and the Han River, and pearl in Chiye. (Each of these places) at different corners of the world is 7800 *li* away from the court.'

e. *Guanzi* Chapter 77, 'Dishu':

'Jade is brought out from Bianshan of *Nuzhi*,¹⁹ gold from Youwu of (the basins of) the Ru River and the Han River, pearl from Moguang of Chiye. Every (one) of these (places) is 7800 *li* away from the Zhou Court.'

f. *Guanzi* Chapter 78, 'Kueiduo':

'(Of the goods of) the north, (the kings Yao and Shun) made use of the jades from *Yuzhi*.'

g. *Guanzi* Chapter 80, 'Qingzhong (A)':

'If the *Yuzhi* does not come to the court, may I request (that we) consider (accepting) white jades as tributes? ... when it is this white jade which, even if it is (tiny and) not visible when it is held to one's chest, or under one's arm, is demanded for with 1000 pieces of gold, then it can be made possible for the *Yuzhi* from 8000 *li* away to come to court'.

¹⁷ Full text in Li Mian, commentator: Guan Zhong, *Guanzi Jizhu Jinyi* 2 vols (Taiwan Commercial Press, Taipei 1988).

¹⁸ Nathan (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 17, n. 16 is as follows: 'According to Niensun Wang, *an* is a misprint of *ao*. However they are phonetically alike in the archaic period'.

b. *Guanzi* Chapter 81, 'Qing'zhong (H)'

'Gold is brought out from Youqu' (of (the basin of) the Ru River and the Han River, pead) from Moguang of Chiyu, and jade from Pangshan of Yuechi. Every (one) of these (places) is 1800 li away (i.e. 8120 kms) from the Zhou court'

Both archaeological and textual evidence indicates that jade carving was introduced into China in the Neolithic period.¹⁷² Jade was not native to China, however, and had to be imported from a considerable distance away. Despite this, both the semi-mystical appreciation of the stone itself, as well as the actual craft of jade working, reached a high pitch of perfection in both Neolithic and Dynastic China, to the extent that Andersson once claimed that 'the penchant for, not to say the worship of jade, the substance itself, seems to have formed a bond that links prehistoric and dynastic China together, differentiating the Chinese race from the rest of mankind.'¹⁷⁴

The Chinese valued white jade (pure nephrite, a type of calcium-magnesium silicate with no imperfections) above all other forms. In its pure and perfect form, the 'true jade' (*chen yu*) acquired a mystical and symbolic character associated with the five virtues of charity, rectitude, wisdom, courage and equity.¹⁷⁵ The only known source of virtually all the jade used in China for at least two thousand years before the Common Era was from the mountains and river valleys of the southwestern Tarim Basin, specifically from near Khotan and Yarkand. All 750+ jade pieces excavated from a Shang Dynasty tomb at Fuhao, for example, have been positively identified as having come from Khotan.¹⁷⁶ Haloun used the references from the *Guanzi* above to argue that trade in jade existed between the Chinese and the Yuezhi from at least the fourth century BCE, although the sources suggest that that trade might have been going on since considerably earlier, which is also the contention of Xinru Liu.¹⁷⁷ Certainly if western Xinjiang was the only source of the stone, then a dynasty occupying and controlling the Gansu Corridor would have been very well positioned to monopolise its supply.¹⁷⁸ The only other possible source of jade that might have been known to the Zhou Dynasty is the area around Lake Baikal, although Siberian jade from this location is distinctive due to the presence of small particles of black graphite embedded in it.¹⁷⁹ There is little or no evidence of Siberian jade entering China until comparatively recently, however, and the most likely conclusion is that all jade used in China during both the Neolithic and Dynastic eras was imported from the western end of the Tarim Basin, and brought into China via the Gansu Corridor.

¹⁷² Naram *ibid.*, p. 17, n. 17: 'Wen Yiduo reads *wn* as *ch'u*...', in reference to 'Youqu' (Chap. 81) or 'Yeuwu' (Chap. 77) above.

¹⁷³ See, for example, Yuan Kang, *Yueh chueh shu* (History of the secession of yueh), SPTK, vol. IX (1920-22) p. 93b; Willets (1958) *op. cit.* p. 49, and pp. 53-8; B. Laufer, *Jade: A Study in Chinese Archaeology and Religion* (Chicago 1912) p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Andersson (1943) *op. cit.*, p. 261, and n. p. 37.

¹⁷⁵ See for example a passage from Hsu Zhen, *Zhou wen zhi zhi* (An Explanation of (Ancient) Figures and Analysis of (Compound) Characters', translated in S.H. Hansford, *Chinese Jade Carving* (London 1950) p. 31.

¹⁷⁶ See Meleun Lin, *The Serindian Civilization: New Studies on Archaeology, Ethnology, Languages and Religion* (in Chinese) (Beijing 1995) p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, pp. 306 ff; and Xinru Liu *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, pp. 306 ff.

¹⁷⁹ Willets *op. cit.*, pp. 60-1.

At the very least then, the cumulative effect of these references in the annals of the Zhou Dynasty is to provide compelling evidence that the Yuezhi were apparently known to the Chinese for up to half a millennium before the founding of the Han Dynasty. The identification of the specific locations mentioned in the Zhou sources is not easy to determine,¹⁸⁰ but the general location of the Yuezhi homeland in relation to the Zhou Court is clear enough – far to the west-northwest, beyond the (Jiayuguan?) Pass, in flat 'grazing' lands beyond the slope(s). The description fits the oasis settlements of the Gansu admirably.

But surely the material does much more than this. There is evidence here suggesting that the Yuezhi may have been actively involved in the importation, breeding and sale of fast 'nomad' steppe-ponies, no doubt much prized by the early dynastic courts. Furthermore, the references to the Yuezhi as suppliers of jade, a stone whose only known source was in the far south-western corner of the Tarim Basin, suggests that the Yuezhi dynasty might have been actively employed for some considerable time in the import of this highly valuable commodity into China. In other words, some time after their arrival in the Gansu the ancestors of the Yuezhi may have identified a demand for nephrite within the Shang Dynasty. Indeed the Yuezhi may even have created this demand by importing the material into the Chinese realm in the first place, and introducing it to the Shang Court. It is unlikely that any Chinese trader or explorer, no matter how enterprising, had made the journey to Khotan by the early-second millennium BCE, and thus the material must have been brought to China originally as tribute or for purposes of trade.

This suggests that the Yuezhi were familiar with both the properties and commercial potential of jade. Given that the Yuezhi federation would come to include a number of different 'tribes' and peoples, it is also possible that some of those federated groups dwelt in the western Tarim and were already well aware of the source and potential of jade. The reference to the Yuezhi as providers of camels in the *Shangshu* (above) also reinforces their role as traders and importers. As would be the case during the Classical era of Silk Roads exchanges (c. 100 BCE – c. 220 CE), the Bactrian Camel was probably the only animal capable of sustaining the long marches necessary for the merchant caravans to traverse the arid stretches between the oases along both the northern and southern Tarim Basin routes.

If indeed the Yuezhi dynasty was in loose commercial control of a vast area stretching from Khotan and Yarkand to Dunhuang (as the extent of Tocharian textual finds also seems to indicate) it is not surprising that Sima Qian would claim that (prior to the advent of Maodun) the Yuezhi were very strong (indeed 'flourishing')¹⁸¹ and treating the Xiongnu with contempt. The import of jade to the dynastic courts of China would have been a very lucrative enterprise indeed. As Willetts has noted, 'all evidence suggests that this beautiful ... material was very rare in prehistoric China – rarer possibly than at any time since – and that only the wealthiest could afford to use it'.¹⁸²

This assessment is reinforced by the reference in *Qingzhong* (A) that 'this white jade ... even if it is (tiny and) not visible when it is held to one's chest, or under one's arm,

¹⁸⁰ See for example Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, p. 30 ff; J. Ogawa, 'Shu Boku-o no sosen Chou', *Shinarekishi Chiri Kenkyu* 2 (Tokyo 1929) pp. 165-7.

¹⁸¹ SJ 110, Watson p. 134.

¹⁸² Willetts *op. cit.*, p. 45.

is demanded for with 1000 pieces of gold'. This was not only one of the three precious objects sought by the Zhou Court (along with gold and pearls) but clearly the most valuable because of its rarity and the difficulty of supply. That the Yuezhi seemed to have monopoly control of this supply suggests that they were a very wealthy and powerful dynasty indeed, which would explain the astonishment of the Han Court in the mid-second century BCE that such a significant people (clearly long known to the Chinese) could be defeated by the Xiongnu.¹⁸³

The evidence of the early Chinese sources thus might be interpreted as indicating that the Yuezhi were in effect in control of a substantial area of Central Asia, and not just of the Gansu Corridor. Pulleyblank commented upon the great geographical spread of the various Tocharian-speaking peoples who may have 'owed allegiance' to the Yuezhi dynasty by at least the third century BCE.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps these various residents of the Tarim Basin not only owed allegiance to the Yuezhi leadership, but may even have constituted part of the 'greater' Yuezhi realm or confederation. As such, both Sima Qian's and Ban Gu's observations that the Yuezhi 'dwelt' in the Gansu between Dunhuang and the Qilian (or 'Heavenly') Mountains would only refer to the residence of the Yuezhi dynastic elite – the 'seat of their king's government' – rather than to any geographical limit of their realm.¹⁸⁵ It would make commercial and political sense to locate their principal settlement at the eastern end of their greater territory, if for no other reason than to facilitate mercantile exchange with the Chinese.

This conclusion is in agreement with parts of an argument proposed by Enoki, Koshlenko and Haidary, although their identification of the Yuezhi not as Tocharians but as Scythians is surely untenable. None the less Enoki *et al* have suggested that the Yuezhi were a very powerful people indeed, with an empire much greater in extent than has generally been considered. The evidence of the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* does indicate that Yuezhi dominance was accepted by many other pastoral nomadic tribes in Central Asia, and that they may even have been dominant far to the west.¹⁸⁶ However Enoki probably goes too far in claiming that 'the (162 BCE) migration of the Yuezhi was not that of a group of people from one place to another, but a withdrawal from the eastern and northern frontiers of the Yuezhi "empire"'.¹⁸⁷ But certainly the Yuezhi dynasty may well have controlled a substantial and significant federation, a conclusion apparently further supported by textual references left by other contiguous groups in the first millennium BCE.

*Indian Textual References*¹⁸⁸

In chronological sequence, following the Chinese primary sources come the Greek references on one hand, and the Indian on the other, both of which name the Tocharians as a distinct 'people' or dynasty. The Yuezhi-Tocharians (with the variants *Tuhkara/Tushkara/Tushara*) are briefly mentioned in several Indian classical

¹⁸³ SJ 110, Watson p. 141.

¹⁸⁴ Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 234, HS 96A 15A.

¹⁸⁶ K. Enoki, G.A. Koshlenko and Z. Haidary, 'The Yueh-chih and their Migrations', in J. Harmatta, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol. 2: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations, 700 B.C. to A.D. 250* (Paris 1994) pp. 174-6.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁸⁸ See Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

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¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 176.

¹⁸⁸ See Narain (2000) *op. cit.* p. 6.

sources, although the amount of information supplied is very meagre. These sources (particularly the epics the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*) concern events which took place in India between c. 1000 and c. 700 BCE, and thus date from the very beginning of written Indian history.¹⁸⁹

Introduction to the Early History of India

The earliest evidence of human activity in India or Pakistan so far discovered goes back to the Second Inter-Glacial Period between 400 and 200,000 BCE. The spectacular Indus Valley Harrappan Culture was the most extensive pre-historic civilisation of the region, and dates from c. 3000 BCE. Its antecedents were an agrarian village culture evidenced by sites in the Baluchistan hills and the Makran coast. The Harrappan Civilisation was an urban-based state structure (similar to that which developed in the late-fourth millennium in southern Mesopotamia), and its two principal cities of Mohenjo-dara and Harrappa displayed an advanced sense of civic planning and organisation.¹⁹⁰ By the second millennium BCE the Harrappan Civilisation had declined, to be replaced in c. 1500 by (probably) an invasion of Indo-Iranians (or Aryans) from the north, part of the third wave of Bronze Age nomadic migrations considered above (although not all historians of Neolithic India agree with the theory of Aryan invasions). The Aryan ('noble ones') tribes were led by aggressive warrior aristocrats on horse-drawn chariots who were armed with good quality copper and bronze weapons. The very mobility of the invaders was their most potent weapon against the irrigation-dependent inhabitants of cities such as Mohenjo-dara and Harrappa, and the Aryans soon took control.

These Indo-Iranian invaders probably set out from their south Russian homeland late in the third millennium, but may have settled for some centuries in Bactria and the Iranian plateau before resuming their migration south through the Hindu Kush passes into northern India. Our knowledge of Aryan culture is largely derived from the *Samhita* ('collection') of the Rig-Veda ('veda of hymns'), and it is possible to trace, through geographical references in the Rig-Veda, the slow but certain progression of the Aryans from the Indus Valley down the western portions of the Ganges and its tributaries. After perhaps playing a role in the decline of the Harrappan culture, the Aryans took up residence in the Punjab before eventually entering the Deccan and the Ganges Valley, home of the so-called 'Painted-Grey Ware' culture (c. 1100 to 500 BCE) – agrarian communities based on the domestication of crops and animals.

By the first half of the first millennium BCE there are unmistakable signs of a superior technology arriving in both the Deccan and Ganges Valley, evidence of the invasion of India proper by the Indo-Iranians who soon abandoned pastoralism and also adopted an agrarian lifeway. By the sixth century BCE, monarchical states (like Kosala and Magadha) began to dominate the Ganges Valley, absorbing or establishing hegemony over the smaller republican states of northern India, and shifting the focus of Indian culture eastwards, away from the valley of the Indus.¹⁹¹ The immediate

¹⁸⁹ For information on recent excavations at Harappa see R.B. Meadow and J.M. Kenoyer, 'Harappa Archaeological Research Project: Major Discoveries from Excavations in 1999 and 2000', in *Circle of Inner Asian Art Newsletter* No. 31 (June 2000) pp. 3 ff.

¹⁹⁰ See for example R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The History of Culture of the Indian People: The Vedic Age* (London 1951) pp. 425–33, 482–88; P. Mussen-Courslet et al., eds., *Ancient India and Indian Civilisation* (London 1934) pp. 88–105.

aftermath of the Aryan invasions of the Deccan and Ganges Valley was an 'heroic age, comparable to the Mycenaean period of Greek history'.¹⁹¹ It is to this age that the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, refers in its description of a war between two rival coalitions of noble charioteers.

References to the Yuezhi in the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas

The *Mahabharata* is the longest single poem in the world. In its earliest forms it has probably existed from the fifth century B.C.E., but its present recension dates from somewhere between 200 and 400 C.E.¹⁹² The traditional date of the war described in the poem is 3102 B.C.E. Set in the fertile and strategic region north of Delhi, it depicts a bitter struggle over land rights between the Kurukshetra and the Kauravas. Originally the poem might have been limited to a story of a local feud, but it caught the imagination of bards and, in its final form, most of the tribes and peoples of the sub-continent ended up participating in the battle. It is in this context that the Tocharians are also mentioned. Although traditionally ascribed to a single Brahman poet, Vyasa, the composition of the work was a corporate affair with various bards providing different episodes. But whilst the *Mahabharata* might be taken as a literary reflection of the aristocratic, militarised age its passages describe, the highly elaborated events and episodes, plus the later inclusion of a mass of religious and pious material, make it highly untrustworthy as a source of accurate historical detail.

The *Ramayana* is shorter than the *Mahabharata* and has fewer elaborations and interpolations. Its composition is traditionally attributed to the poet Valmiki. The events described occurred later than those in the *Mahabharata*, and the scene is set further east, in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The story of a struggle for the throne of Kosala, and of the fourteen-year exile of Rama to Sri Lanka, contains the description of a fierce battle in which the demon king Ravana is killed, allowing Rama to be installed eventually as king. His long reign is associated with prosperity and justice, and the term *Ramarajaya* (the reign of Rama) is still used in India to describe a utopian state. The description of Rama's crossing of the sub-continent from north to south, and his conquest of Sri Lanka, may represent the Aryan penetration into southern India (from c. 800 B.C.E.), and the original *Ramayana* may have been composed from a century or so later. An earlier date of composition is also possible if one reads the conflict between Rama and Ravana as a description of local conflicts between the agriculturalists of the Ganges Valley and more primitive hunter-gatherer communities of the Vindhyan region.

The *Puranas* recount the semi-mythical history of India from the advent of Manu Svayambhu (the 'first king' of India) and his descendants. His tenth and most famous successor, also named Manu, survived a great flood, and it was from him and his family that the human race sprang; (the name Manu actually provides the generic base for the word *manava* meaning 'mankind'). The *Puranas* trace the descent of Manu Svayambhu's progeny to the kings of the epic period – the aristocratic heroes of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* – and then continue to chronicle the dynasties of the historical period in an unbroken sequence of kings.¹⁹³ The traditional accounts in the

¹⁹¹ As McNeill puts it, in W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago 1963) p. 189.

¹⁹² See for example N. K. Sathana, *The Heroic Age of India: A Comparative Study* (New York 1930) pp. 48–9.

¹⁹³ On the *Puranas* see A. L. Basham, *A Cultural History of India* (Oxford 1975).

Purāṇas were collected between c. 500 BCE and c. 500 CE and are not entirely mythical, containing references to historical events including the settlement of the Aryans in the Ganges Valley, as historians have long recognised.¹⁹⁴ A particular incident referred to in the *Purāṇas*, for example, is the washing away of the great Hastinapur by a Ganges flood. Hastinapur was the capital of one of the families involved in the *Mahabharata* war, and the *Purāṇas* state that this event occurred in the reign of the seventh successor to the king ruling Hastinapur immediately after the war. Archaeological excavations at the site of Hastinapur have confirmed the washing away of parts of the capital in about 800 BCE, which suggests c. 900 BCE as the probable date of the war.¹⁹⁴

The Tocharians/Yuezhi, named by the variants of *Tukhara*, *Tushkara* or *Tushara*¹⁹⁵ (*Tushara* can also be translated to mean 'snow' or 'cold')¹⁹⁶ are noted as a people living to the northwest of Madhyadesa (i.e. the modern Indian state of Madhya Pradesh) in all three sources, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahabharata* epics, and the *Purāṇas*. This dates the references anywhere from the eighth century (more likely fifth to fourth) BCE to the fifth century CE. Although the concept of *Tushara*/*Tukhara* varies considerably depending on the specific text (or even within a single part of a text) in which they are mentioned, they are often associated with other 'foreign' peoples including the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks),¹⁹⁷ Sakas (Scythians), Kusa (Kushans), Cinas (Seres – Chinese) and Pahlavas as 'outlandish people'.¹⁹⁸ They are always located in the north, and often to the north of the Himalayas.¹⁹⁹ None the less, the information provided is meagre in the extreme, much less even than is provided for the Yavanas.²⁰⁰ However, although the chronology is beset with almost insuperable problems, the placement of references to the *Tukhara* in relation to those to the Yavanas might suggest that the *Tukhara* (Tocharians) replaced the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks) in a region to the north, as the classical sources suggest (and as will be explored in detail in Chapter Five).²⁰¹ Some specific references from these and other Indian classical sources are as follows:

Mahabharata:²⁰²

They are noted as bringing tributes to Yudhisthira, and as soldiers in the army of Duryodhana at his Raya suya, and as amongst those peoples who were vanquished by Arjuna.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ R. Thapar, *A History of India* (Harmondsworth 1966) n. p. 31.

¹⁹⁵ Although the people's name is sometimes rendered as *Tushara* rather than *Tukhara*, Pargiter suggests that the 'sh' was often used in ancient northern India to represent a spoken 'kh'. See F. F. Pargiter, *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age* (Oxford 1913/1962) intro. and notes, p. xix.

¹⁹⁶ Narain also provides a list of Classical Indian references to the Yuezhi/Tocharians in Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ 'Yavana' is a Sanskritisation of 'Ionia', i.e. Ionian Greeks, which later also came to include Romans and other peoples of the Mediterranean world. See H. Roy, 'The Yavana Presence in Ancient India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. xxx (1989) pp. 311–25.

¹⁹⁸ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁹ See S. Chattopadhyaya, 'The Mahabharata and Some Kushan Problems', *Central Asia in the Kushan Period* (Moscow 1975) vol. II, pp. 68–70.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ See P. C. Bagchi, 'Ancient Indian History up to 711 A.D. – Presidential Address', in *Indian History Congress Proceedings* (Aligarh 1943) pp. 28–9, 35–9.

²⁰² See esp. *Mahabharata* II.51 and 177, VI.75; VIII.73 and 88, XII.65. See also C. Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, I.2 and II.1 (Osnabrück 1968).

²⁰³ S. Sorenson, *Index to Names in the Mahabharata* (Delhi 1963) pp. 683–4.

Puranas:

Among the various lineages of kings which followed the Andhras (and the Yavanas)²⁰¹ there were fourteen *Tukhara* kings ruling, as Narain puts it, for an 'unbelievable' 700 or 500 years. However Pargiter has argued that this number might be reasonably corrected to 107 or 105 years.²⁰²

Vikramankadevavarit:

In this later work, the name *Tukhara* is used to describe a particular type of horse, the 'Tukhara-horse',²⁰³ which finds resonance with the Chinese Zhou Dynasty reference to *taotu*. As suggested earlier, it would not be at all unusual for a 'people' of pastoral nomadic ancestry to be associated with, or even identified by, their horses.

Rajatarangini:

In this even later work, the Kushan kings (including Kanishka and Huvishka) are called *Turushka*.²⁰⁴

Clearly the evidence of the Indian classical sources is of limited value, but does at least indicate that from the middle of the first millennium BCE, Indian bards and poets were aware of the existence of a militarised Tocharian people to the north whose forces were substantial, renowned and mobile enough to be included in a list of possible participants in some semi-mythical battle between the two major competing noble houses in the heroic age of Indian history. Furthermore there is a suggestion that the Indians might have been aware that it was the Tocharians who replaced the Indo-Greeks in the regions south of the Hindu Kush. It is a long way from the Ganges to the Gansu, but considerably closer to the southwestern Tarim Basin (particularly by way of the ancient Karakorum passes between Kashmir and Xinjiang), and Indian knowledge of the Tocharians might therefore possibly be interpreted as further evidence of the influence of the Yuezhi-Tocharians, particularly in Khotan and Yarkand, during the same period in which the Chinese sources suggest that the Yuezhi might have been importing jade from that region. And the fact that the Tocharians were also associated with a particular horse (the *Tukhara*) suggests that the Indian sources, like the Chinese, were apparently aware of the ancestral steppe-nomadic lifeway (not to mention horse supply operations) of the Yuezhi.

*Greek and Other Textual References*²⁰⁵

There are references to the Yuezhi (always by variants of the name 'Tocharian') in several classical sources, notably works by the Greek geographers Ptolemy and Strabo as well as Polybius, the anonymous prologue of Pompeius Trogus, Pliny and the epitome of Justin. Most of these references occur in relation to the conquest of the

²⁰¹ Narain (1990) *op. cit.* p. 152.

²⁰² Narain (1990) *op. cit.* p. 6, Pargiter *op. cit.* pp. 44-7, 72.

²⁰³ M. Monier-Williams, *U.Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Oxford 1899) p. 449.

²⁰⁴ *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana, ed. M.A. Stein (Reprint, New Delhi 1960) I 168-70. English translation by R.S. Pandey, *The Narmad of the Kings of Kashmir* (Allahabad 1936).

²⁰⁵ For a very but still useful translations and analysis of the classical accounts of India see J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient Geography as described by Ptolemy* (London 1885); also R.C. Maqumdar, *The Classical Accounts of India* (Calcutta 1960).

Indo-Greek kingdom of Bactria, and as such are of more relevance to Chapter Five of this book. However Ptolemy mentions a people he calls the *Thangouan* dwelling in the Gansu, and later the *Takouan* north of Imaus (the Himalayas), the *Ungouran* near Ysyk Kul, the *Tachouan* in Sogdian and the *Tocharan* in Bactria, all of which will be considered in detail below. As already suggested, these references to the 162–130 BCE migration of the Yuezhi from the Gansu to Bactria provide convincing evidence that identifies the Yuezhi with the Tocharians. That Ptolemy was aware of Tocharians living in the Gansu at all is extraordinary, and it is worth considering briefly his methods in an attempt to understand the source of his knowledge, particularly as further reference to his observations will be made throughout this book.

Claudius Ptolemaeus (c. 87–150 CE) was a distinguished mathematician, musician, astronomer and geographer, ‘one of the most accomplished men of science that antiquity produced’, according to McCrindle.²⁰⁹ He flourished in Alexandria around the middle of the second century CE (specifically in the period 127–145 CE) during the reign of the Roman Antoninus Pius. Ptolemy’s *Geographica* appeared in eight Books. The first dealt with his proposed two-dimensional projections for map-making; Books 2 to 7 described the various regions of the known world; and Book 8 was an outline of his sources.²¹⁰ Tarn suggested that as a geographer Ptolemy was ‘extremely painstaking but devoid of critical and historical instinct’.²¹¹ He was determined to include somewhere in his *Outline of Geography* the vast mass of material from sources of all kinds that he had at his disposal, and not to be particularly critical or selective in evaluating the worth of a particular source or piece of information.

Ptolemy’s principal informant for the locations contained in his *Geographica* (and the associated map) was a near (though slightly older) contemporary, Marinus of Tyre. Marinus in turn relied upon a caravan itinerary he had purchased from a Macedonian trader named Maes Titianus, who drew his information from his own agents. Marinus was suspicious of the possible exaggeration of distances contained in Maes’ itinerary,²¹² (although William McNeill has pointed out the great efficiency of Silk Roads caravans, which averaged about 6 kilometres per hour over all terrain).²¹³ Ptolemy then plotted the information provided by Marinus (via Maes) on a map, made allowance for exaggeration, and located place names accordingly. This somewhat inexact method resulted in some spectacular mislocations and Tarn concluded that ‘the only value of his co-ordinates is to indicate that a place probably stood *somewhere* in that locality or to give very roughly its *relative position*’.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ McCrindle *ibid.*, p. 1. See also A. Hermann, ‘Marinus von Tyrus’, in P. Petrmans, ed., *Geographische Mittheilung en supp.* 209 (1930) pp. 44–54; L. Bagrow, ‘The Origins of Ptolemy’s *Geographica*’, in *Geografisker Annaler* 27 (1945) pp. 318–387; E. Polaschek, ‘Ptolemy’s Geography in a New light’, *Imago Mundi* 14 (1959) pp. 17–37; J. D. Lerner, ‘Ptolemy and the Silk Road, from Baktra Bederica to Sera Metropolis’, *East and West* vol. 48, Nos. 1–2 (IslAC), June 1998) pp. 9–25.

²¹⁰ For another detailed and thoughtful consideration of Ptolemy’s methods see L. Forday, *Mounted Victory: The Beginnings of Central Asian History* (Durham 1997) pp. 404–418.

²¹¹ Tarn (1938) *op. cit.*, p. 231.

²¹² See Mallory and Mallory *op. cit.*, pp. 50–52 for a recent discussion of Ptolemy’s methods.

²¹³ W. H. McNeill, ‘The eccentricity of wheels, or Eurasian transportation in historical perspective’, *American Historical Review* 92 (1987) pp. 1111–1126.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–2.

Tam also suggested that on occasions Ptolemy would get a name of a people or place from somewhere, and try to place it as closely as possible to its most probable location. Hence Ptolemy discovered the name *Tochari* in connection with Bactria, and listed them as a Bactrian tribe rather than as one of the principal groups of nomads (Tocharian Yuezhi) responsible for the conquest of Bactria.²¹⁵ In his most easterly reference to the Yuezhi (probably also based on an itinerary provided by Maes Titianus) Ptolemy notes that a people called the *Thagouroi* were dwelling on the Silk Route in the Gansu, and had a city called *Thogara*.²¹⁶ This 'city' has also been named in a Sakan and Tibetan text, as shown below. Ptolemy also listed a *Takorian* living north of the Himalayas,²¹⁷ and a *Tagouraratoi* dwelling in the vicinity of Ysyk Kul,²¹⁸ where the Yuezhi would settle for almost three decades during the first stage of their migration to the west, events examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

Ptolemy (and indeed many of the ancient Greek commentators on Central Asia) probably had another source for much of their information. Tam postulated some 'unknown' historian who 'related the movements of the Tochari', and nominated the similarly unnamed 'source' of Pompeius Trogus.²¹⁹ More recently John Gardiner-Garden has convincingly identified this source as one Apollodoros of Artemita, who wrote at least four books of his *Parthika* on Parthian, Bactrian and nomadic history during the first century BCE.²²⁰

The late Professor H.W. Bailey published numerous translations of several ancient Inner Asian manuscripts which further demonstrated that the Tocharians were known to a range of contiguous peoples in Inner Asia by the middle of the first millennium BCE. These included the Tibetans, who called them *Thod-kar*, *Tho-gar* and *Tho-kar*;²²¹ the Khotanese Sakas who named them as *Taugara*;²²² the Turks who called them *toxyr* in both Manichaean and Buddhist texts;²²³ and the Persians who used the name *Twryat*.²²⁴ Ptolemy's reference to the *Thagouroi* dwelling in a 'Silk Roads' city of *Thogara* is surely to be identified with a Gansu town named *taugara* in a Khotanese Sakan text, and a *Togara* also located in Gansu in a Tibetan text, i.e. with Dunhuang(?).²²⁵ Given the possible degree of interaction between the Yuezhi-Tocharians and Khotan (as a result of the jade trade) and the proximity of Tibet to the Gansu and the southern Tarim Basin route, the fact that Greek merchants, Khotanese Sakas and Tibetans were all aware of the Yuezhi and their 'principal city' is hardly surprising, particularly if the Yuezhi were indeed the powerful and prosperous people that a range of textual evidence seems to indicate they were.

²¹⁵ Ptol. *Geog.* vi, 11; see Tam *op. cit.*, p. 285.

²¹⁶ Ptol. *Geog.* vi, 16, 5 and 8, from the Maes Titianus itinerary.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vii, 2, 15.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vi, 14, 7-14.

²¹⁹ Tam *op. cit.*, p. 516.

²²⁰ J. Gardiner-Garden, 'Apollodoros of Artemita and the Central Asian Skythians', *Papers on Inner Asia* No. 5 (Bloomington 1987).

²²¹ H.W. Bailey, 'Taugara', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* VIII(4) (London 1935-37) pp. 883 ff.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 884-5.

²²³ Bailey (1947-48) *op. cit.*, pp. 126-153.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Bailey (1935-37) *op. cit.*, pp. 884-5; F.W. Thomas, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1931), pp. 834-5.

VII

Conclusion: The Origin of the Yuezhi

Despite an apparent paucity of material, then, the archaeological, philological and textual evidence, when reviewed cumulatively and in comparative detail, provides a surprisingly significant amount of information about the possible origins of the Yuezhi, and allows for a tentative reconstruction of their early history. In narrative form, and without further recourse to the detailed references and evidence catalogued above, a 'history' of the Yuezhi c. 2500–220 BCE might read something like this:

There is compelling archaeological and philological evidence that between the mid-fourth and late-second millenniums BCE, pastoral nomads speaking Indo-European and Indo-Iranian languages moved out of their original homeland (located from southern Russia north of the Caucasus, east towards the steppes of Kazakhstan) in three large-scale migratory waves, and occupied a significant area of Inner Eurasia. This ranged from the sedentary states of the Fertile Crescent, through Iran, Bactria, northern India and the southern steppes of Russia and Siberia, to as far east as Mongolia and eastern Xinjiang. The first two migrations (of the Early and Middle Bronze Age) were predominantly by Indo-European *centum* speakers, and the third invasion (in the Late Bronze Age) by Indo-Iranian *satem* speakers. Soviet and Russian archaeologists have found extensive evidence of each invasion in their territories, particularly in southern Russia, southern Siberia, and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, and have assigned names to each of the three general *kurgan* cultures that participated in these Bronze Age invasions. It was the 'Afanasevo' culture of the Middle Bronze Age that is the most likely candidate for having included the ancestors of the Yuezhi-Tocharians. They were probably motivated like the other migrating Indo-Europeans to move out of their original homeland by climatic and population pressures.

The Afanasevo culture was concentrated in the Altai-Yenisei region of Siberia. There they assumed a semi-sedentary, agriculture-based lifeway for half a millennium before being uprooted again and forced south around the beginning of the second millennium by the arrival of Late Bronze Age Indo-Iranian-speaking invaders associated with the Andronovo culture. Henning sought the proto-Yuezhi further west, attempting to identify them with the Gutu, a group of 'outsiders' who are named in Akkadian and Babylonian inscriptions, but this link is at best tenuous. More fruitful perhaps is archaeological evidence from Xinjiang – the discovery of the so-called 'Urumqi Mummies' whose 'Caucasoid' Europoid features make them potential candidates for identification as Tocharian-speaking members of the Yuezhi confederation.

The ancestors of the Yuezhi located their 'principal settlement' in the Gansu near Dunhuang sometime not long after c. 2000 BCE; certainly thereafter there is little evidence of any further disruption of that locale by later invaders. The research of Andersson, Průšek and Pulleyblank – which collectively finds no *later* evidence of migration into the region by 'outsiders' – in no way militates against an arrival by Indo-European-speakers in the Gansu at the *beginning* of the second millennium. Over the ensuing centuries the ancestors of the Yuezhi consolidated their position in both the Gansu and the Tarim Basin, wedged in as they were between Iranian-

speaking invaders to the west, and Mongolian pastoral nomads and Neolithic Chinese agriculturists to the east. They gained considerable notoriety amongst their neighbours during the first millennium BCE because they are mentioned in the literature of a significant number of contiguous peoples — the Chinese, Tibetans, Khotanese Sakas, Buddhists, the 'classical' Indians and even the Greeks. Such a widespread knowledge of their existence, military strength and mercantile activity is striking evidence of the power and prestige of Yuezhi-Tocharian culture.

References in the Zhou Dynastic Annals in particular suggest that the Yuezhi may also have been in control of a huge swathe of present-day Xinjiang, transporting jade and horses from the western regions of their territory to trade with the Zhou Court. The Yuezhi most probably spoke the Indo-European *centum* branch dialect of Tocharian, evidence of which has been discovered at a number of sites in both the northern and southern Tarim Basin. The identification of the Yuezhi as Tocharian-speakers is an indirect result of the references to several Tocharian groups by the second century CE Greek geographer Ptolemy, occupying five locations across Central Asia known to have been on the itinerary of the 162 BCE westward migration of the Yuezhi following their defeat by the Xiongnu, a topic that more properly belongs to subsequent chapters.

In short, then, the ancestors of the Yuezhi were probably Indo-European-speaking pastoral nomads who migrated to the eastern steppes during the Middle Bronze Age, and who then eventually found themselves sometime in the second millennium BCE occupying a strategic part of the Gansu Corridor (with their principal stronghold near Dunhuang), and exercising some sort of commercial control over extensive areas of the Tarim Basin. There they prospered through trade and achieved a not inconsiderable reputation based on their wealth, prestige and force of arms. The other pastoral nomadic tribes of the region treated them with the sort of respect that indicates their superiority. Such was the situation when they first came to the notice of the Han chroniclers after 220 BCE, but their hitherto unquestioned status was soon to be challenged by the military power and political ambition of a new and powerful nomadic alliance based further east and known as the Xiongnu. From that moment on the Yuezhi very definitely entered the annals of recorded history.

Chapter Two

The Yuezhi in the Gansu: 220 – 162 BCE

Introduction

Of course any claim that from 220 BCE the Yuezhi 'very definitely entered the realms of recorded history' needs qualification, because the history of ancient Central Asia is more often characterised by a lack of literary evidence. The field of Yuezhi/Kushan studies in particular remains principally the domain of the numismatist and archaeologist. However, for certain periods in Yuezhi and early Kushan history, textual material is available which not only provides literary support to the other forms of evidence, but is in fact tangible enough in its own right to provide a framework for the compilation of a tentative narrative history of this relatively unknown yet highly significant period in world history. Indeed, for the story of the Yuezhi in the Gansu and of their migration to and settlement in Bactria, literary material (along with generally tentative archaeological reports) is virtually the only evidence available.

This written evidence is provided in the main by three ancient Chinese historical texts, the *Shi Ji* of Sima Qian, the *Han Shu* of Ban Gu and his father Ban Biao, and the *Hou Han Shu* of Fan Ye. It is with the first two texts that this and the next two chapters will be principally concerned. When used in conjunction with a comparative study of Greek literary references and archaeological data, the texts corroborate, confirm and place into context the more material evidence of tombs, coins and the remains of early fortified settlements. The Han Annals provide compelling evidence of military, cultural and historical events in ancient Central Asia during three key periods in Yuezhi history, and whilst any adequate research into the period clearly requires an understanding of the evidence from all sources, a careful analysis of the textual material is the essential prerequisite. To that end the initial aim of this chapter will be to introduce and explore this textual evidence, and confirm its absolute significance in any attempt to produce a narrative history of the Yuezhi. A second and associated intention is to discuss speculative archaeological evidence for the Yuezhi in the Gansu and Tarim Basin. Before turning to either of those considerations, however, it is essential to locate both evidential strands in the wider ethnographic context of nomadic interaction with the sedentary agrarian civilisations of Eurasia during the first millennium BCE in general, and of the relationship between several groups of 'barbarians' and the Qin and Han Chinese Dynasties in particular.

1

Han/Nomadic Relations During the 1st Millennium BCE

Introduction

It is only from early in the first millennium BCE, then, that substantive written sources on Inner Asia become available for the first time, literary references which

significantly increase the amount of information available to the historian. Whilst the quality of these sources – mainly chronologies, accounts, itineraries and official and ‘unofficial’ histories – varies considerably, the portrait of Inner Asian geopolitics that emerges is surprisingly illuminating. None the less the limitations of many of these sources mean that archaeological research continues to be absolutely vital, but at this stage evidence from this area of enquiry remains tentative and scarce. Although Russian and Central Asian archaeologists have developed a rich tradition of Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age research in Central Asia, similar material discoveries from Western China (particularly for the ‘late’ Yuezhi period c. 300–160 BCE) are very limited. On a Eurasian-wide scale, however, certain trends and processes have become apparent through the work of archaeologists.

From early in the first millennium BCE there is indisputable evidence of renewed pastoral nomadic mobility in the steppes, apparently focused on an epicentre in central or eastern Kazakhstan and south Siberia, from which most of these movements seem to emanate.¹ The principal cause of this increased activity was probably once again climatic change, with the prevalence of cooler and drier weather making both pastoralism and agriculture more difficult in the steppes. The pastoralists may have reacted by grazing their herds over larger areas, or by seeking new pasturelands further south, leading to an increase in nomadism.² Explanations must also take other factors into account, however, including overpopulation, an intensification of ‘trans-ecological trade with Outer Eurasia’,³ and possibly an increased nomadic military technological capacity through the development of a more powerful compound bow. Indeed Pulleyblank has argued that the development of the compound bow is the most significant factor of all in explaining the high level of nomadic activity during the period.⁴ It was the consequent enhancement of the military power of mounted archers, following the development of the compound bow, which became the principal distinguishing characteristic of the classic horse nomadism of the era. This in turn allowed for ‘the formation of steppe empires as powerful as the agrarian empires that had emerged on the fringes of the steppes in Outer Eurasia’.⁵ The relationship between the Xiongnu and the Han is a striking example of this technologically-induced redistribution in the balance of power between militarised semi-nomadic pastoralists and a sedentary agrarian civilisation, as will be shown below.

Although debate on the underlying causes of these increased levels of pastoralist mobilisation might be inconclusive, it is clear that one result of this new wave of widespread militaristic migration over large areas of Inner Eurasia was the establishment of a vast and uniform zone of pastoral nomadism. This in turn was reflected in the creation of a relatively homogenous and inclusive ‘pastoralist culture’ shared not only by the Indo-European speakers but also by Turkic, Paleo-Siberian and Mongolian-speaking nomads. Watson loosely termed this ethno-culture

¹ See for example F. Jacobsen, ‘Burial Ritual, Gender and Status in South Siberia in the late Bronze Early Iron Age’, *Papers on Inner Asia* No. 7 (Bloomington 1987) pp. 2–5.

² Khazanov *op. cit.*, p. 95; L.T. Yablonsky, ‘Some ethnogenetical hypotheses’, in J. Davis-Kimball, V.A. Bashilov, L.T. Yablonsky, eds., *Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in the Early Iron Age* (Berkeley 1993) pp. 241–52.

³ Christian (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.* pp. 451–2.

⁵ Christian (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 125.

'Seythic'.¹⁰ The impact of the appearance of a new wave of aggressive and well-armed expansionist pastoral nomadism was felt from China to the Balkans, and indeed the effect was just as significant for the Chinese as it was for West Asia. As Pulleyblank suggests, the coming of 'full-blown horse-rider nomadism' in the first millennium BCE was an event of 'great moment in both western and eastern Asia'.¹¹

Literary evidence of mobile and warlike pastoralists harrying the Chinese along their northern borders dates from early in the first millennium BCE. These nomads probably originated in western Mongolia or the Altai, and rode small, tough Przewalski horses. In both the steppes of eastern Mongolia and the Ordos region, pastoral nomadism became dominant and almost eliminated small-scale agriculture right along the northern frontier zones. The Chinese authorities were at something of a loss initially when considering how to combat this 'barbarian' threat. Yen Yu, a general of Wang Mang (who established the short-lived Xin Dynasty between 9 and 23 CE) was highly critical of the approach taken by his Zhou ancestors. In particular he criticised King Zhuang of the Western Zhou (r. c. 827–782 BCE), condemning his border policy as 'mediocre' and complaining that he had simply 'pursued (the nomads) to the border and returned'. He took the barbarian invasion just as the sting of an insect. 'It was enough to just "knock them off"'.¹² Of course the Zhou rulers quickly came to realise that the threat was very serious indeed, so much so that the 'barbarian menace' probably contributed significantly to the collapse of the Zhou Dynasty by 771.¹³

In the year 307, some four and a half centuries later, the Zhou ruler Wuling, following a 'famous' debate amongst court officials, attempted to take a more intelligent approach to the problem, ordering his soldiers to copy 'barbarian' tactics in their efforts to defeat them. His armies abandoned their chariots and adopted cavalry warfare and archery, attiring themselves in 'barbarian' trousers instead of tunics.¹⁴ This was the beginning of something of a revolution in Chinese military tactics for dealing with the nomads. It has even been argued that the Qin Dynasty's ultimate victory in reunifying China under their leadership following the 'Period of the Warring States' might have been at least in part due to their successful adoption of steppe methods of warfare.¹⁵

Each of the three major states of the Late Warring States Era – the Qin, Zhao and Yen – also attempted to shut out the 'barbarian menace' by constructing a series of defensive walls. The Qin were the first to build, beginning probably no later than 324 BCE, although not completing their defences in parts of the Gansu and Ningxia until 270. The Zhao built a wall from Yuncheng in Suiyuan to Yenmen and Tai in Shanxi in c. 300 BCE, followed by King Zhao of Yen who also constructed a long wall in c. 290.¹⁶ Despite these innovations, and later more intensified levels of defensive wall

¹⁰ W. Watson, *Cultural Frontiers in Ancient East Asia* (Edinburgh 1971) p. 109 and p. 113.

¹¹ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 451.

¹² HS 94B 64 A. See S. Jüggehid and V. J. Symons, *Peace, War and Trade Along the Great Wall* (Bloomington 1989) p. 52.

¹³ On the effect of nomadic invaders on China during the mid-late first millennium, see for example Chang (1977) *op. cit.*, pp. 390–97, and Prütsek (1971) *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 119, 130–134, 224.

¹⁴ See Christian (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹⁵ See for example Khazanov (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 96, and SJ 110, Watson p. 159.

¹⁶ See Ying Shih Yu, 'The Hsiung-nu', in D. Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge 1990, reprinted 1994) p. 118.

building in the third century (when the Qin connected, repaired and extended the walls), the nomadic pressure along China's northern borders continued to build. By the time Han historians began to take notice of the Yuezhi, the dynamic inter-relationship between China and several substantial pastoral-nomadic federations (including the Xiongnu, Donghu, Fingling, Wusun and Yuezhi) had clearly become the most serious political and military problem facing the new Han Dynasty. This relationship will be explored below through a detailed consideration of the Chinese literary material, but so pivotal to any understanding of the account are the Xiongnu and Wusun that they deserve a brief introduction of their own, so that their role in subsequent events might be better understood.

The Xiongnu

Of all the nomadic groups whose histories are touched upon in the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji*, by far the most powerful and troublesome for the Han were the Xiongnu, who were initially based in the Ordos region and in the northern loop of the Huanghe (or Yellow River).¹⁵ They may have been descended from an earlier barbarian grouping, the Xianyun, who are named in the *Shi Ching* as having attacked the Western Zhou in c. 780 BCE,¹⁶ an event also discussed in the *Shi Ji*.¹⁷ Sima Qian actually quotes a poem from the Zhou Period *Book of Odes*, which describes the conflict with the Xianyun:

We smote the barbarians of the north.
We struck the Xianyun
And drove them to the great plain
We sent forth our chariots in majestic array
And walled the northern regions.¹⁸

The ode is prophetic though somewhat overconfident, for this would be only the first of innumerable Chinese brushes with the 'barbarians of the north', and the ongoing conflict would define Chinese foreign policy under three dynasties (the Zhou, Qin and Han) for at least a millennium. The timing and location of the sudden appearance and disappearance of the Xianyun clearly identifies them as an early example of what Pulleyblank called the 'eastern reflex of the revolutionary introduction of horse-riding nomadism, which appeared around the beginning of the first millennium BCE and dominated the history of Central Asia until modern times'.¹⁹ The Chinese attempts in the last third of the millennium to ward off the barbarian menace by constructing a series of defensive walls along their northern frontier (as noted above) were to little avail.²⁰ By the third century, the Zhao General Li Mu was forced into defending the

¹⁵ For a succinct single chapter account of the Xiongnu and their ongoing conflict with the Han, see Christian (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 183–208. On the possible identification of the Xiongnu with the Huns, see for example O. Maenchen-Helffer, 'Huns and Hsiung-nu', in *Byzantium* 17 (1944–45) pp. 222–243. For a superb single volume account of the relationship between various early Chinese dynasties and the Xiongnu, see N. Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁶ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 449.

¹⁷ SJ 110, pp. 130–1.

¹⁸ SJ 110, p. 131. Sima Qian actually quotes from three different poems, 'Bigong' of the 'Temple Odes' of Lu, and 'Luoyue' and 'Chun' of the 'Lesser Odes'.

¹⁹ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 449.

²⁰ For primary evidence of the construction of 'long walls' see SJ 110, Watson p. 133, as well as *op. cit.*, pp. 448–9.

northern frontier against a 'new' group of militarised 'barbarians' called the Xiongnu (although they are more likely to have been a different political grouping formed out of earlier nomadic peoples (including all or some of the Xianyun, Manzhou, Houtong, Daxian, Yiqu, Dali, Wuzhu, Qiyun, the Forest and Mountain Barbarians and the Loufan)¹⁹ than a new arrival into the region). In fact Sima Qian suggests that the ancestry of the Xiongnu stretched back for over a thousand years before the appearance of Maodun late in the third century BCE:

'Over 1,000 years' had elapsed from the time of Chuwei, the ancestor of the Xiongnu, to that of Maodun, a vast period during which the tribes split up and scattered into various groups, sometimes expanding, sometimes dwindling in size. Thus it is impossible to give any ordered account of the lineage of Xiongnu rulers.²⁰

The term 'Xiongnu' is treated somewhat ambiguously in all the Chinese sources (particularly the *Shi Ji*) in that it is used both in a generic and a particular sense, describing a large and varied group with a single overall leader, but also a particular group of nomads who spoke the specific 'Xiongnu' language.²¹ The philological identity of the language spoken by this core group is a matter of considerable debate. It was probably an early form of either Turkic or Mongolian, similar to that spoken by another more westerly-located group known as the Jingling.²² As noted in the previous chapter, however, Pulleyblank disputed this and agreed with Ligeti that there is a 'good possibility that they may have spoken a language belonging to the Palaeo-Siberian family'.²³

The Xiongnu (or more accurately various groups within their confederation) were described by Sima Qian as following a semi-nomadic style of pastoralism, living in small camping groups in tune with seasonal migration patterns:

'They move about in search of water and pasture and have no walled cities or fixed dwellings, nor do they engage in any kind of agriculture. Their lands, however, are divided into regions under the control of various leaders.'²⁴

They were accompanied by horses, cattle, sheep, goats and Bactrian camels in their migrations, which ranged from short excursions to pastures in hilly regions such as the Hangai mountains, to longer trips into the Gobi.²⁵ In battle the Xiongnu used complex bows that could penetrate armour, as well as swords and spears.²⁷ Excavations at Noin-Ula in northern Mongolia suggest they may have used stirrups and saddles with pommels.²⁸ The excavation of Noin-Ula and other Xiongnu sites also indicates that it would be incorrect to regard the Xiongnu as exclusively nomadic.

¹⁹ SJ 110, Watson p. 132.

²⁰ Sima Qian's '1,000 years' is surely a trope, and should be taken to mean simply 'a long time ago'.

²¹ SJ 110, Watson p. 136.

²² Christian, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²³ S. Jagehid and P. Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Boulder 1979) p. 206; and J. Janhunen, *Manchuria: An Ethnic History* (Helsinki 1996) p. 189.

²⁴ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.* p. 451; and Ligeti (1950) *op. cit.*, pp. 141-188.

²⁵ SJ 110, Watson p. 129.

²⁶ Jagehid and Hyer *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²⁷ I. McFwen, R.L. Miller and C. A. Bergman, 'Early bow design and construction', *Scientific American* (June 1991), 264(6) pp. 50-6.

²⁸ N. Ishijima, 'Nomads in Eastern Central Asia', in J. Harmatta, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* vol II (Paris 1994) p. 160.

A more detailed account of Xiongnu archaeology will follow towards the end of this chapter, but the various fortresses and settlements uncovered reveal a complex economic structure and varied lifeway that included, somewhat surprisingly perhaps (on the surface at least) 'proto-town based semi-sedentism'.

Of more relevance here is the rise of Xiongnu military power. Under their most feared *Shanyu* Maodun, the Xiongnu became a potent force, utilising feigned retreats, sudden surprise attacks, constant harassment of weakened enemies, and exceptional discipline to defeat their enemies. Indeed, despite centuries of a relatively even balance of power between several of the principal pastoral-nomadic and oasis-dwelling peoples from the Gansu to eastern Mongolia (although with the Yuezhi clearly the most powerful, according to the sources), once Maodun assumed the leadership of the Xiongnu after killing his father in 209 BC¹, none of the other 'barbarian' peoples could match the newly-forged potency of the Xiongnu.

'When Maodun came to power ... the Xiongnu reached the peak of their strength and size, subjugating all of the other barbarian tribes of the north and turning south to confront China as a rival nation.'²

Under Maodun and his successors, the political administration of the confederation of ethnically-diverse tribes which nomadised over vast regions within defined areas became highly efficient, with a sophisticated management structure in which power was delegated by the *Shanyu* to the 24 Great Leaders of the Council of State. Directly beneath the *Shanyu* were the four most senior members of the Council (known as *wangs* or kings) ranked from 1 to 4. They were the recognised successors to the *Shanyu* and the four most senior military commanders:

1. The Wise King of the Left: responsible for the Xiongnu's eastern wing, along the northern borders of the Han state.
2. The Luli King of the Left: responsible for the forces behind (or to the north of) the Wise King of the Left.
3. The Wise King of the Right: responsible for the western wing including regions north of the Gansu.
4. The Luh King of the Right: responsible for the forces behind and north of the Wise King of the Right.

Beneath the four *wangs* were the remainder of the 24 'Great Leaders', each of whom was personally entitled to a military unit known as the 'Ten Thousand Cavalry', although not all were awarded the full complement. Each Great Leader appointed his own *xiao wang* (Lesser King) to take charge of his personal staff and administrative matters. The *xiao wang* were often selected from amongst the chiefs of federated tribes for the Xiongnu, like the Yuezhi, were not an ethnically homogenous 'people'

¹ There is a sort of rule-of-thumb in the steppes that rulers who set up powerful pastoralist states usually start building settlements of a substantial size. The fact that the Xiongnu had also begun to construct impressively-sized settlements is therefore probably a reflection of the fact that they had formed an imperial dynasty, like Chinggis Khan's family, and should therefore be regarded as an indication of the political scale on which the Xiongnu operated during their peak.

² SJ 110, Watson p. 136

but a confederation of ethnically and linguistically diverse tribes who had sworn allegiance to the *Shanyu*.³¹

The Wusun

By the time the Wusun (which literally means 'Grandson of Raven') came to the attention of both Ban Gu and Sima Qian (mainly through their inclusion in the report of Zhang Qian), they had already moved from their original homeland in the eastern Gansu and taken up residency in the Ili Basin of northwestern Xinjiang and southeastern Kazakhstan. As their migration was closely associated with the expulsion of the Yuezhi from the Gansu and their subsequent pursuit and harassment by the Wusun in the Ili Basin, a detailed consideration of their relocation will follow in Chapter Three. Of more relevance to this discussion, however, is the location of the original home of the Wusun prior to migration, and their role in the events during the first half of the second century BCE that are detailed below. Zhang Qian located this original homeland in the same general region occupied for centuries by the Yuezhi dynasty, that is east of the principal concentration of the Yuezhi and west of the Xiongnu – 'a small state on the western border of the Xiongnu territory'³² – which can only mean the eastern Gansu. That general description is supplemented by more precise references in the *Han Shu*:

'Formerly Zhang Qian had said: "Originally the Wusun dwell together with the Da Yuezhi in the area of Dunhuang ...".'³³

'Originally Wusun had lived with the Da Yuezhi between the Qilian (Mountains) and Dunhuang ...'.³⁴

Despite these very clear textual references, several scholars have attempted to place the original Wusun homeland at a range of disparate locations – from somewhere near Lake Barkol and north of Hami, to the Altai or Tängri Tagh, although the latter clearly only became their homeland *after* they had migrated away from the Gansu and driven the Yuezhi from the Ili.³⁵

The difficulty scholars have had in allowing for the possibility of an original Gansu location for the Wusun stems from research by Haloun, published in 1937. Haloun collected all references to the original homeland of the Yuezhi, and argued that they must have occupied the whole of the Gansu corridor, as well as additional areas further to the east and northeast, leaving no room for the Wusun anywhere in the Gansu.³⁶ However, whilst being very particular in collecting textual references to the Yuezhi, he simply ignored or waved aside similar specific references to the Gansu as also being the original home of the Wusun.³⁷ Thus, with apparently no room for the

³¹ Sima Qian provides detailed information on the political structure of the Xiongnu in SJ 110, Watson pp. 136-7. See also Torday *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9, T.J. Bartfield, 'The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organisation and Foreign Policy', in *Journal of Asian Studies* 41 (1981).

³² SJ 123, Watson p. 238.

³³ HS 61.2A.

³⁴ HS 61.4B.

³⁵ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 92, for example.

³⁶ Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, pp. 243-318, particularly map opposite p. 296.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 293-5.

Wusun in the Gansu (even though this conclusion was based on the use of selective evidence), and with a general (although unjustified) assumption amongst modern scholars that the Xiongnu must have dominated the *whole* of Mongolia, the Wusun were automatically relegated to northern Xinjiang or the Altai, despite there being no evidence to justify this. As a result Haloun³⁸ (and later Pulleyblank)³⁹ both incorrectly located the Wusun in the Altai. But a careful reading of evidence for the pre-expansion (i.e. pre-209 BCE) homeland of the Xiongnu shows that their western territory lay mainly in the Ordos region, extending beyond the Huanghe into the southeastern Gansu.⁴⁰ This left an area in the northeastern Gansu where the early Wusun could very well have been lodged as 'a small state on the western border of Xiongnu territory',⁴¹ and thus there is no need to doubt the evidence of the Chinese sources.

The Wusun lifeway was also essentially one of pastoral nomadism, similar to that of the Xiongnu, as Sima Qian observed: 'moving from place to place in the region with their herds of animals. Their customs are much like those of the Xiongnu'.⁴² Pulleyblank links the ancestors of the Wusun with those of the Yuezhi, arguing for a common cultural origin for both tribal groupings, but his suggestion is based solely on his conviction that, as close neighbours to the Yuezhi Tocharians, the Wusun probably also spoke an Indo-European *centum* language.⁴³ Certainly if the Yuezhi and Wusun were cohabiting the same pastures, they would probably need to have spoken the same language, and therefore to have belonged to the same general ethnicity, as Torday has also suggested.⁴⁴ Whatever their linguistic antecedents the Wusun, along with the Xiongnu and Han, were destined to play a crucial role in the history of the Yuezhi dynasty and thus of ancient Inner Asia itself. It is this dramatic tale of the redistribution of the balance of power in regional geo-politics during the second century before the Common Era that unfolds in the annals of Sima Qian and Ban Gu, and as such their texts constitute the most fundamental and crucial evidence for the events that led to the defeat and forced migration of the Yuezhi from their ancient homeland.

II

Han Dynasty Textual Evidence

Introduction

For the Yuezhi/Tokharian scholar, the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* lift the curtain on events in China and Central Asia between their earliest mention of the Yuezhi in c. 220 BCE, and the visit of Han envoy Zhang Qian to the Yuezhi's principal settlement in northern Bactria c. 128 BCE. The Chinese annals chart the shift in the balance of nomadic power along China's northwestern frontier; the defeat of the Yuezhi by the

³⁸ Haloun, p. 296.

³⁹ J. G. Pulleyblank, 'The Wusun and Sakas and the Yueh-chih Migration', *Bulletin of the School of Asian and Oriental Studies* 33 (1970) pp. 154-169, particularly p. 156.

⁴⁰ S1110, Watson, p. 136.

⁴¹ S1123, Watson, p. 238.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴³ J. G. Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 457.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* *op. cit.*, p. 209.

Xiongnu in the Gansu and by the Wusun in the Ili Basin; their migration to the west via the Ili, Dayuan (Ferghana) and Kangju (Sogdiana); their defeat of the resident Sakas and 'conquest' of Bactria; and their establishment of a strong military and political presence in northern Bactria. A later addition to the *Han Shu* then appears to describe the dispersal of the Yuezhi into five tribal divisions (or *yabghu*) and their location within Bactria by late in the first century BCE. The *Hou Han Shu* (Annals of the Later Han) briefly recaps the situation in Bactria during the period of the five *yabghu*s before going on to relate the expansion of Yuezhi-Kushan power under the early kings Kujula Kadphises, Vima Tak[to] and Vima Kadphises, up until perhaps c. 100 CE.

Each of the three Chinese works has been translated several times over the past century or so, and the accessible work of Levi, Chavannes, de la Vallée Poussin, Dubs, Pulleyblank, Zurcher, Enoki, Hulsewe, Loewe and Watson (amongst others) has provided the opportunity to compare versions and consider any translational and interpretive differences. The texts have also been extensively analysed and discussed from an historical perspective by the translators and others, particularly in reference to Yuezhi-Kushan history but, I would argue, by no means exhaustively. Their importance as evidence demands that they be continuously reconsidered and reassessed to help illuminate a range of geo-political issues in Central Asia during the key periods described above, and not just to provide support for the archaeological evidence.

One of the principal intentions of this section of the chapter is to analyse in comparative detail the evidence provided by the *Shi Ji* and the *Han Shu* in the hope that it might shed yet further light upon the political and military relationship between the Yuezhi, Xiongnu, Wusun and Han up to 162 BCE. I must make it absolutely clear that I am *not* a scholar of Classical Chinese, and have relied throughout this book on the versions provided by the translators listed above, along with detailed and greatly appreciated advice from Chinese scholars at Macquarie University. I have approached this material not as a philologist but as an historian seeking to utilise all pieces of evidence to help determine the most likely course of events. As such my first task has been to consider the context in which the Han annals were produced, and the methods used to do so.

The *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji*

The early Chinese dynastic histories were primarily compiled by the literary upper class of government officials, usually under the patronage and supervision of the central government. The historian based his work almost exclusively on an enormous mass of official records - 'the sediment deposited by centuries of bureaucratic administration'⁴⁵ - and thus tended to limit the focus of the work. Many subjects, including the affairs of foreign states, were never discussed or included unless they had directly impacted upon the affairs of dynastic China. Thus the histories often describe only those events in Central Asian history that took place during periods of Chinese hegemony. The 'Memoirs on the Western Regions' in the *Han Shu* and the later *Hou Han Shu* are basically reviews of Chinese administration in the region, which explains their somewhat repetitive, pseudo-official and statistical nature. The

⁴⁵ E. Zurcher, 'The Yueh-chih and Kaniska in the Chinese Sources', in A.L. Basham, ed., *Papers on the History of Kanishka* (Leiden 1968) p. 348.

same holds true, although to a lesser extent, of the *Shi Ji* of Sima Qian, which particularly in Chapter 123 is concerned with the diplomatic mission undertaken by Zhang Qian, and with the effect his report on the states of the Western Regions had on Han imperial foreign policy. This does not devalue the importance of these works as evidence, however, and indeed the fact that the 'histories' are compiled largely from official reports increases their value as clearly the most accurate (if frustratingly incomplete) 'snapshots' available of the region during specific periods of Han engagement.

The *Shi Ji* was started by Sima Tan and completed by his son Sima Qian between c. 110 and c. 90 BCE.¹⁷ The work was framed as a general history of China from remote antiquity until the lifetime of the author. The important overlap with the *Han Shu* covers the period of roughly 210–90 BCE, for which the two texts are in many ways almost identical. Sima Qian (c. 145–90 BCE)¹⁸ who like his father held the position of 'Grand Astrologer', was in an excellent position to gather material for his history. Most chapters in the second volume of his work deal with the reign of the Emperor Wudi, the period of Sima Qian's own lifetime. He was thus writing in this later volume not of some romanticised past, nor merely copying and systematising the written documents of ancient China,¹⁹ but writing of the emperor and court within which he spent most of his adult life.²⁰

'Undoubtedly he heard the speeches of many of the men he describes, listened to the deliberations of the courtiers, consulted files of official documents kept in the palace, and observed the effects of various government policies when he accompanied the Emperor on tours through the provinces. He had personally visited some of the barbarian lands that were being brought under Han rule by Emperor Wu's foreign conquests, and in other cases he no doubt heard from the generals themselves the accounts of their wars and hardships'.²¹

But despite the contemporaneous, almost 'eye-witness' nature of the annals the *Shi Ji* should not be read uncritically, because it is largely composed of multiple and often contradictory accounts of many important events.²² As Markley has observed, 'a thorough analysis of the multiple narratives contained in the *Shi Ji* reveals numerous difficulties, misleading statements, outright contradictions and potentially fictional

¹⁷ The dates of Sima Qian's life, as well as the compilation of his history, remain an almost insoluble problem, constantly discussed in sinological literature. The dates provided above (c. 145–90 (or perhaps 87 BCE)) are the more commonly accepted.

¹⁸ These would have included the *Shu Ching* which covered 17 centuries beginning, according to legend, in 2357 BCE, and the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, reputedly written by Confucius from the court annals of his native state of Lu, and which covered the period 722 to 481 BCE. Torday reminds us that the first Qin Emperor Huangdi ordered the destruction of all books, and only a single copy of each was preserved in the archives. When later the Han ousted the Qin, many of these copies were destroyed in a palace fire, and the Han urged their scholars to rewrite the lost books from memory, and with the aid of whatever remnants remained. Sima Qian would have had a great opportunity to consult these reconstructions. See Torday *op. cit.*, p. 132, n. 11.

¹⁹ B. Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian by Sima Qian - Han Dynasty II* (Revised Edition) (Columbia University Press 1993) Intro. p. xi.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Three interesting studies on the use of the *Shi Ji* as historical evidence are G. Ricardo Hardy, *Objectivity and Interpretation in the "Shi Chi"* (Yale University Dissertation 1988), S. Durant, *The Clouds Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (New York 1995), and G. Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York 1999).

episodes'.⁵³ It is essential, therefore, to fully consider these multiple accounts (where they exist) in any attempt to use the *Shi Ji* as definitive historical evidence – as this study attempts to do. In addition, as Markley further remarks, unlike Tacitus or Thucydides, Sima Qian did not always make it obvious when he was about to express an opinion or undertake an analysis of events, and as a result clearly exercised 'personal influence over the view of history portrayed in his accounts'.⁵⁴ Historians of this period must thus be constantly alert to distinguish personal analysis or even guesswork from the more straightforward narrative account.

The *Han Shu* (Annals of the Early Han) was compiled by historian Ban Gu (32–92 CE) and Ban Zhao (sister of General Ban Chao) sometime between 36 CE and 110–121 CE, which means that work on the history stretched over about eight decades. It is based at least in part on the work of Ban Gu's father, Ban Biao (3–54 CE), and drew on material collected and prepared up to two centuries earlier, although certain sections may have been revised or amended soon after 75 CE. The information contained in Chapters 61 and 96, which refers specifically to the states of the Western Regions including that of the Greater Yuezhi, is statistical in nature and could only have been derived from official reports submitted to the Central Han Government in Xian by the Office of the Protector General, established in 59 BCE.⁵⁵ Hulsewe and Loewe argue that the office was:

... the only institution capable of assembling such information, and the only one to be charged with the duty of forwarding it elsewhere ... If this hypothesis is accepted, it can be taken that the information applies to the period when a Protector General was actively in his post in the Far West, i.e. some time between 59 BC and AD 16'.⁵⁶

However Pulleyblank (among others) has shown that some of the revised information in the *Han Shu*, particularly that contained in the 'Account of the Western Regions' in Chapter 96, was probably provided to the authors considerably later than 16 CE by the most important of the Protectors General of the Western Regions, Ban Chao. Mallory and Mair have also suggested that, 'the fact that Ban Chao was responsible for Chinese colonial administration in the Western Regions means that the Ban family could have received accurate information about conditions in Central Asia directly from him'.⁵⁷ The provision of this updated information can thus be dated specifically to the period 74/75 CE (or soon afterwards) when Ban Chao first went out to the Western Regions as a subordinate officer under Zhen Mu.⁵⁸ The statistical data was therefore probably subject to verification or revision on several occasions during the compilation of the account, which only serves to increase its accuracy. One of the key statistics regularly provided, for example, is the distance of each state from both

⁵³ J. Markley, 'Gaozu Confronts the Shanyu: The Han Dynasty's Clash with the Xiongnu', in C. Benjamin and S. Lieu, eds., *Bells and Frontiers in Inner Asian History*, Silk Roads Studies VI (Turnhout 2002) p. 131.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ On the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Office of the Protector General, see M.A.N. Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London 1974) pp. 228–230.

⁵⁶ A.F.P. Hulsewe and M.A.N. Loewe, *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage, 125 B.C. – A.D. 23*, An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty (Leiden 1979) pp. 10–11.

⁵⁷ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁸ F.G. Pulleyblank, 'Chinese Evidence for the Date of Kaniska', in A.L. Basham ed., *Papers on the Date of Kanishka* (Leiden 1968) p. 250.

the Han capital at Xian and the seat of the Protector General, as measured in *li*, and no doubt these distances in particular were constantly revised as more accurate measurement took place by subsequent Han embassies.

It must be accepted, therefore, that the data contained in Chapters 61 and 96 of the *Han Shu* provide clear and relatively accurate information on the location, population and relative strength of many of the key states of Central Asia between 210 and 90 BCE (the date of Zhang Qian's diplomatic mission from Wudi to the Yuezhi until perhaps as late as the last quarter of the first century of the Common Era). Furthermore, much of the information learned by both the intrepid envoy and the subsequent colonial administrative office was retrospective and concerned the earlier histories of the states, so that in the case of the Yuezhi in particular both the *Han Shu* and the *Shi Ji* are also able to shed considerable light on the changing nature of the relationship between the Yuezhi, the Xiongnu and the Wusun at the beginning of the second century BCE, some seventy years before Zhang Qian's mission.

There remains the vexed question of the comparative authenticity of the two histories. Despite the fact that most Chinese commentators assumed for centuries that the original version of the two texts was Sima Qian's, and that it had been subsequently copied and updated by Ban Gu (in what was after all a later work) more recent analysts have argued that in fact the *Han Shu* may have been the original source for much of Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji*. As was noted above, while the two works for the period 210–90 BCE are in most instances almost identical, the *Han Shu* clearly contains information that is generally more specific, statistical and orderly. Hulsewe and Loewe have offered a substantial argument that the original strips of bamboo on which Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji* would have been written may have been lost, and the chapter subsequently reconstructed out of *Han Shu* material,⁵⁸ (although this is disputed by Pulleyblank, Daffina and Zurcher, particularly with regard to the authenticity of Zhang Qian's report on the Western Regions).⁵⁹ The issue is made more difficult to resolve by the fact that the earliest complete copies of both texts that historians possess are printed editions made in the eleventh century for the *Han Shu*, and the twelfth century for the *Shi Ji*, leaving a break of some thousand years in textual transmission. Thus Hulsewe and Loewe correctly conclude that:

'As it cannot be said for certain to what extent portions of the text were lost during that period, only cautious statements can be made regarding the inclusion of material uniquely in either the *Shi Ji* or the *Han Shu* for the period that they both cover'.⁶⁰

However, even though the two texts offer remarkably similar views of the period 210–90 BCE, and even if there is convincing evidence to regard Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji* as something of a patchwork of fragments from the *Han Shu*, the difference between the information provided by the two texts is still useful. There is no doubt that the difficulties inherent in the interpretive process needed to turn Classical Chinese texts

⁵⁸ One *li* is equal to approximately 400 metres, so 2.5 *li* equals 1 kilometre. The distance between the Han capital city of Xian and the seat of the Protector General was 7238 *li*, or c. 2900 kms.

⁵⁹ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Zurcher *op. cit.*, p. 358, for example; also A.F.P. Hulsewe, 'The Problem of the Authenticity of Shih Chi 123, The Memoir of Fa Yuan', *T'oung Pao* 61 (1975) pp. 83–133. Torday *op. cit.*, pp. 127–135 has a detailed discussion of this controversy, which must, for reasons of lack of space, remain largely outside of the core focus of this book.

⁶¹ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 12.

into readable English have resulted in a considerable degree of distortion of the original intention of a particular textual passage. Hence one must be very careful indeed in overemphasising apparent differences between the two accounts, which may simply be a result of different interpretive emphases.⁶¹ None the less, it could be argued that certain differences of detail (but not of emphasis) do increase the evidential value of each individual text, and that if the two are used in comparison with each other (as opposed to in isolation), the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* represent considerable value to historians of the Yuezhi. This importance is illustrated in a consideration of the general categories of information provided by the texts.

Location: The *Han Shu* is generally more precise and systematic with distances. Many of the descriptions give the specific (although usually rounded off) number of *li* which separated the states from the Imperial Han capital or other nearby states, and often also from the seat of the Protector General, as well as an indication of direction. The *Shi Ji* also often gives distances and directions (sometimes of a less detailed nature) which often supplement and complement the 'original' *Han Shu* information. Despite the apparent precision of distances indicated in both texts, however, the exact number of *li* quoted should not necessarily be taken too literally. Such figures were collected under often difficult circumstances using imprecise measuring equipment, were frequently revised and updated, and were often simply estimations of probable distance, particularly when applied to states beyond the direct administrative control of the Han government (for example Anxi-Parthia and Tiaozi-Mesopotamia). None the less, there were a great many commercial and diplomatic journeys undertaken through the region during both the Early and Later Han Dynastic eras, and there were no doubt careful attempts made over several centuries to provide accurate measurement distances. Any claim for reasonable accuracy should not be too hastily dismissed.

One of the most consistent locational statistics given in the *Han Shu* is the number of *li* a state was distant from the Seat of the Protector General. The Office of the Protector General was established in 59 BCE with Zheng Zhi as its first incumbent. His brief was 'to maintain Chinese influence over the various states and tribes of the region so as to prevent the Xiongnu from commanding their support against the Han'.⁶² His headquarters were established in the state of Wulei-Yarkand, chosen for its 'comparatively central position amongst the western states'. Wulei was accessible to messengers, and also well placed to call for military assistance. The location was fertile and potentially self-supporting, and it lay between the Han colonies of Luntai and Chuli, well placed for supervising the work of the colonists.⁶³ All references to the distance of a state from the Office of the Protector General therefore translate to the number of *li* separating that state from Yarkand.

Population, Size and Military Strength: Again the *Han Shu* is the more systematic, orderly and precise, subdividing population statistics into three headings: Households; Individuals; and Persons Able to Bare Arms. Some counts are given almost to the final digit (the state of Shulo-Kashgar, for example, has 18,647 individuals),⁶⁴ while

⁶¹ I am grateful to Joe Cribb of the British Museum for strongly emphasizing this point to me in private correspondence.

⁶² P. E. Liinos, *Pan Ku, the History and Han Shu* 94 (University of Michigan 1988) p. 39.

⁶³ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5.

⁶⁴ HS 96A 20B.

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⁶³ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5.

⁶⁴ HS 96A 20B.

others are more approximate and rounded off, as is the case with Dayuan (with 300,000 individuals).⁶⁵ Here again it would be imprudent to suggest that the population figures contained in the texts are accurate to the final digit (despite the apparent claim for such precision by the Han chroniclers). They clearly do provide, however, the most reliable information available for the relative size and strength of the various states described.

Environment and Lifeway: Both texts provide information on the number of cities or towns contained within each state. Using the example of Dayuan again, for example, both the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* note the existence of some 70 cities of various sizes in the state.⁶⁶

Events and History: By using the information contained in the relevant chapters of the two Chinese histories, therefore, it is possible to assemble a clear and relatively accurate picture of the location, size, military strength, climate, ethnicity, level of urbanisation and lifeway of most of the various 'peoples' and 'states' which sometime during the last two centuries before the Common Era found themselves of political or commercial interest to the Han. The information is also sufficient in most cases to make reasoned inferences about both the recent history and the current state of geo-political affairs in the region, particularly in reference to the Yuezhi, which is why a detailed textual analysis is of critical importance to this book. Zurcher divided the information on political events provided by the Chinese sources into two categories:

- a) 'Those events which directly concerned the Chinese local authorities and which sometimes made counter-measures necessary, such as local dynastic changes, revolts, internal strife etc.
- b) 'And in some cases a series of events in the past which led up to present political conditions, such as previous tension or clashes between various kingdoms, the story of the foundation of a reigning house, or migrations.'⁶⁷

It is this often almost incidental mention of events that provides most of the evidence contained in the Chinese sources for the Yuezhi. This and subsequent chapters, then, combines all of the relevant information contained in the two texts in an attempt to assemble as clear, accurate and exhaustive a description as is possible of the literary evidence for the Yuezhi during three critical periods in their history – the last half century of their residency in the Gansu; their migration to the west; and their arrival in, and subjugation of, Bactria.

III

Chinese Textual Evidence for the Yuezhi in the Gansu

Using the informational categories outlined above as an organisational framework, what follows is a comprehensive consideration of all the textual references to the Yuezhi in the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* during their residency in the Gansu between c. 220 and 162 BCE.

⁶⁵ HS 96A 17B.

⁶⁶ HS 96A 17B; SJ Watson p. 223.

⁶⁷ Zurcher *op. cit.*, pp. 349-50.

Location

'Originally the (Yuezhi) people dwelt between Dunhuang and other Qilian (Mountains)'.⁶⁸

'The Yuezhi originally lived in an area between the Qilian or Heavenly Mountains and Dunhuang'.⁶⁹

These locational references (along with others noted above to the location of the Yuezhi and Wusun)⁷⁰ are clear and specific. According to both Ban Gu and Sima Qian, the 'principal settlement' (or area of maximum concentration) of the Yuezhi dynasty in the third century BCE, and prior to their 'eviction' by the Xiongnu, was at the western end of the Gansu (present day Hexi = 'West of the [Yellow] River') Corridor between Dunhuang and the Qilian Shan (or Heavenly Mountains). However, recent Chinese archaeological discoveries have seen a number of 'podboy' tombs discovered near Minqin (well to the east of Dunhuang) tentatively ascribed to the Yuezhi, as will be shown below.

Despite the apparently unambiguous information contained in the sources, various scholars have attempted to locate the Yuezhi's homeland outside of the Gansu. Lin Meicun, for example, has argued that the 'Dunhuang' of the Han sources was located nowhere near present-day Dunhuang, and that it should more properly be identified with Dunhong Mountain (*Shanhuang* in ancient Chinese) in the Tian Shan.⁷¹ Lin further suggests that the Qilian Mountains mentioned in the texts are not the Qilian of the modern Gansu, but rather the 'mountains of heaven', also the Tien Shan, and thus the Yuezhi actually dwelt in the region of Turpan.⁷² Whilst such a relocation for at least a section of the Yuezhi tribal confederation is well within the bounds of possibility (particularly as the Tocharian linguistic evidence considered in the previous chapter indicates that Yuezhi-Tocharians may have been in control of a vast area of both the Gansu and Xinjiang, including Turpan), the number of textual references specifically locating the Yuezhi's principal settlement at the western (controlling) end of the strategic Gansu Corridor are too compelling to ignore. Narain has alternatively suggested that the principal Yuezhi settlement was actually located a considerable distance further to the east, near the upper bend of the Huanghe (i.e. close to Xiongnu territory, thus allowing no room to fit in the Wusun).⁷³ But again there is neither textual nor archaeological evidence to support this relocation at this stage, and certainly this book must follow both the Han sources and (admittedly) tentative archaeological evidence in continuing to locate the Yuezhi in the central and western Gansu.

The Gansu is a natural, narrow corridor linking China with Xinjiang, bordered in the north by smaller mountain ranges (the Longshou Shan, Mazong Shan and Heli Shan) and extensive deserts (particularly the Badain Jaran Shamo). To the south, the

⁶⁸ HS 96A 14B.

⁶⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

⁷⁰ HS 61 2A, 4B.

⁷¹ Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasty and the Chinese Civilization* (in Chinese) (Beijing 1998), p. 78; see also V. Mair, 'Reflections on the Origins of the Modern Standard Name 'Dunhuang'', in Li Zheng et al, eds., *Ji Xianlin Jiaoshan Huadan Jiantan Wenji* (Essays for the 80th Birthday of Professor Ji Xianlin) vol. 2 (Beijing 1998) pp. 933 ff.

⁷² Meicun *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁷³ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 21.

impressive ramparts of the Qilian Shan rise up to a maximum elevation of 5650 metres, and the melting snows of the range feed a large number of streams that flow north into the corridor. Today and throughout history these streams have sustained oasis communities such as Yongchang, Ganzhou, Jiayuguan, Anxi and Dunhuang. The corridor is more than 1200 kilometres long, about 200 kilometres wide at its broadest point, and no more than 15 kilometres at its narrowest. Beyond the Jiayuguan Pass, at the very end of the Ming extension to the Great Wall, the region is largely barren and inhospitable all the way to Dunhuang.⁷²

This was (and is) an arid and forbidding landscape, not particularly conducive to steppe nomadic pastoralism. Indeed those members of the Yuezhi federation dwelling in this environment probably adopted a semi-sedentary, oasis-centred lifeway based on limited stock grazing and agriculture, which probably also included the use of irrigation (despite the fact that this is not the impression given in the Han sources, as will be shown below). Narain also argues that the Yuezhi were more likely to have been oasis-dwellers than nomadic pastoralists, suggesting that they 'were essentially a dominant oases people, not just steppe nomads'.⁷³ And Owen Lattimore has further argued that this type of oasis-based lifeway remained the Yuezhi's preference even during their later relocations.⁷⁴ Of course, as was suggested in the previous chapter, the Yuezhi dynasty's realm (as indicated by the diffusion of Tocharian) may very well have extended all the way from the Gansu to as far west as Khotan and Yarkand in the western Tarim Basin, along both the northern and southern routes. Yet given the barren nature of most of that vast landscape, it is still difficult to isolate any region within it that might have been suitable for extensive steppe pastoralism. As such there seems little ecological or geographical evidence to support the Chinese historians' contention that the core Yuezhi dynasty at least remained essentially nomadic pastoralist.

Population, Size and Military Strength

'There were more than 100,000 trained bowmen, and for this reason they relied on their strength and thought lightly of the Xiongnu'.⁷⁵

'They (the Yuezhi) have some 100,000 or 200,000 archer warriors. Formerly they were very powerful and despised the Xiongnu'.⁷⁶

'The Da Yuezhi attacked and killed Nantoumi (*Kunmo* of the Wusun), seizing his lands, and his people fled ...'.⁷⁷

(From the 'Memoir of Zhang Qian', describing the situation in the Gansu Corridor c. 135 BCE) 'The area west of Wusun as far as Anxi is close to the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu had once harassed the Yuezhi; consequently when a Xiongnu envoy carrying tokens of credence from the *Shanyu* reaches one of the states, the states en route

⁷² For a contemporary description of the route from Jiayuguan to Dunhuang see J. Bonavia, *The Silk Road* (London 1988) p. 159; see also V.H. Mair, 'Dunhuang as a Funnel for Central Asian Nomads into China', in G. Seaman, ed., *Ecology and Empire: Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World* (Los Angeles 1989) pp. 143 ff.

⁷³ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ O. Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (London 1953) p. 450.

⁷⁵ HS 96A.14B.

⁷⁶ SC 123. Watson p. 234.

⁷⁷ HS 61.4B.

provide a relay service of escorts and food, and do not dare to detain or harm the envoys.¹⁰⁰

These passages describe a powerful federation with a substantial military force of between 100,000 and 200,000 warriors (however one regards the accuracy of such figures) who probably fought from horseback, 'barbarian style', using the composite bow and arrow. (Although the texts do not specifically state that the Yuezhi fought on horseback, it is a reasonable assumption that all Chinese references to 'barbarian' archers implied that this was the case). Visual evidence from Khalechayan (which will be considered in detail in Chapter Five) certainly appears to depict mounted Yuezhi archers. The fact that the Yuezhi may not have generally followed a nomadic pastoralist lifeway in no way militates against their using pastoralist military methods and technologies. In such terrain and over such distances, by far the most effective method of fighting must have been on horseback, and the most potent weapon was the composite bow, whether the core population was only semi-nomadic or even semi-sedentary (as indeed were both the Wusun and Xiongnu).

It would surely be more accurate to think of the Yuezhi 'army' not as homogenous, but as consisting of contingents from a range of subordinate tribal groups that clearly followed a range of different lifestyles – from sedentary agriculturists through traders in jade and horses to pastoral nomads. The Yuezhi was a dynasty that gave its name to a fairly stable confederation of tribes, even if the tribes were varied ethnographically and linguistically (as was also the case with the Xiongnu). And the confederation, however it was constituted, was clearly powerful enough at this stage to treat both its immediate Gansu neighbours – the Wusun adjacent to the east, and the more populous Xiongnu even further east – with apparent disdain. The Yuezhi probably enjoyed this sort of definite military superiority over all of their neighbours for most of the 1st Millennium, although the names of these various tribes and 'peoples' changed often during that time. This of course makes the relatively sudden alteration in that balance of power that occurred when Maodun became the *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu even more dramatic.

The references also provide further evidence of the obvious reputation and widespread notoriety of the Yuezhi prior to their defeat by the Xiongnu. The passage describing the courteous and helpful treatment afforded to Xiongnu envoys by oasis states of the Western Regions (particularly along the northern Tarim Basin route) late in the second century BCE indicates that they received this treatment, not only because of Xiongnu military superiority, but equally because the occupants of those states were so impressed by the fact that the Xiongnu had been able to defeat the Yuezhi – 'the Xiongnu had *once harassed* the Yuezhi'. That this was clearly an impressive achievement, and had earned for the Xiongnu respect and a healthy fear, says much about the reputation of the dynasty they had been able to 'harass' and defeat. This passage also lends support to the conclusion of the previous chapter that the Yuezhi realm was probably very extensive indeed, including much of Xinjiang, if oasis states of the northern Tarim Basin (all the way from the Wusun in the Ili Basin to Anxi/Parthia) were sufficiently in awe of the Yuezhi to treat their conquerors with such respect.

¹⁰⁰ HS 96A.19A.

Lifeways

The Da Yuezhi was originally a nation of nomads. The people moved around in company with their stock animals, and followed the same way of life as the Xiongnu.⁸¹

They are a nation of nomads, moving from place to place with their herds, and their customs are like those of the Xiongnu.⁸²

As argued above, it is difficult to reconcile these descriptions of steppe nomadic pastoralism with the decidedly unsuitable geographical location of the Yuezhi's principal residency as described in the texts, and even if the Yuezhi were masters of a substantial realm, there were few locations within either the western Gansu or Xinjiang suitable for a pastoral-nomadic lifeway. The exception to this is the Qinzhan Plateau south of the Gansu and eastern Xinjiang, to which elements of the Yuezhi (the Xiao or Lesser) would migrate following the confederation's defeat in 162. Here at least there were pastures and steppe-like terrain suitable for nomadism. However the evidence of the earlier Zhou Dynasty sources clearly indicates that the Yuezhi dynasty proper had probably occupied this same base in the Gansu for a considerable period of time. No doubt elements of the Yuezhi did still 'move about from place to place with their herds', but the ruling dynasty at least had long been semi-sedentised, dependent on both oases-based irrigation agriculture and trade for their existence.

For the Han historians, information about the Yuezhi in the western Gansu was clearly second hand, filtered through accounts from Xiongnu informants or the report of Zhang Qian compiled a century later. The Han may simply have assumed that the Yuezhi, like all the other groups of 'barbarians' (including the Xiongnu, Wusun, Tunghu and Tingling) were essentially pastoral nomads. Certainly the Yuezhi's ancestors were steppe nomads ('originally a nation of nomads'), and even as semi-sedentised agriculturists the Yuezhi dynasty was probably anxious not to abandon links to its ancestral lifeway. It would not be at all surprising to find references to, and echoes of, nomadic pastoralism amongst the Yuezhi elite, centuries or even millennia after they had abandoned pastoralism as an actual way of life.

IV

Chronology of Events: c. 220 – 162 BCE

Both the *Shi Ji* and the *Han Shu* contain a significant number of references to the political and military relationship of all of the pastoralist groups living in an arc along China's western and northern borders. By sorting these references into some sort of chronological order, a clear and datable sequence of events becomes apparent. Obviously this tentative sequence then needs to be corroborated (where possible) by any other available evidence to more firmly establish a narrative account of the most probable course of events. None the less the preliminary outline provided by the Chinese sources is surprisingly full, clear and coherent. The material comes mainly from *Shi Ji* 110 ('The Account of the Xiongnu') and 123 ('The Account of Dayuan') by Sima Qian, and *Han Shu* 61 ('The Memoir of Zhang Qian and Li Guangli') and 96 A and B ('The Memoir of the Western Regions') by Ban Gu.

⁸¹ HS 96A 15A.

⁸² SJ 123, Watson p. 234

- 246 – 210 BCE:** Reign of Qin Shi Huangdi (founder of the Qin Dynasty)
- 209 – 208 BCE:** Reign of Ershi Huangdi (second and last Emperor of the Qin Dynasty)
- To c. 207 BCE:** *The Yuezhi enjoy military superiority over their neighbours:*

'There were more than 100,000 trained bowmen, and for this reason they (the Yuezhi) relied on their strength and thought lightly of the Xiongnu ...'⁸³

'They (the Yuezhi) have some 100,000 or 200,000 archer warriors. Formerly they were very powerful and despised the Xiongnu ...'⁸⁴

'At this time the Eastern Barbarians were very powerful and the Yuezhi were likewise flourishing'.⁸⁵

With a powerful force of 100,000 to 200,000 trained archers at their disposal (although again these figures are undoubtedly a trope and should be more accurately translated as 'seriously a lot!'), the Yuezhi enjoyed a significant military superiority over the Xiongnu, who early in the second decade of the third century found themselves uncomfortably wedged in between the Dong Hu to their east, the Chinese Qin to the south, and the Yuezhi to the southwest. As a result, in 217 BCE the *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu, Touman, had little option other than to withdraw 'to the far north, where he lived with his subjects for over ten years'.⁸⁶ However, with the collapse of the Qin Dynasty in 207, the Xiongnu enjoyed a respite from Chinese pressure and returned to take up their former residency along the northern border, probably just to the south of the great bend in the Huanghe.

c. 215 BCE: *Touman sends his heir apparent to the Yuezhi as hostage*

'Touman's oldest son, the heir apparent to his position, was named Maodun, but the *Shanyu* also had a younger son by another consort whom he had taken later and was very fond of. He decided that he wanted to get rid of Maodun and set up his younger son as heir instead, and he therefore sent Maodun as hostage to the Yuezhi nation. Then, after Maodun had arrived among the Yuezhi, Touman made a sudden attack on them. The Yuezhi were about to kill Maodun in retaliation, but he managed to steal one of their best horses and escape, eventually making his way back home. His father, struck by his bravery, put him in command of a force of 10,000 cavalry'.⁸⁷

That the *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu would send his heir apparent to the Yuezhi is further evidence of the unequal relationship between the Xiongnu and their more powerful neighbours at this time. The significance of hostages to the Sino-Barbarian tributary system (particularly as it developed from the mid-first century BCE) is largely outside the scope of this study, but the sending of hostages had a very clearly-defined function. As Ying Shih Yu (in considering the Han acceptance of 'barbarian' hostages) explains it, 'the taking (or accepting) of a hostage from the "barbarians" ...

⁸³ HS 96A.15A. I am anxious to avoid undue repetition of textual references, but occasionally must do so to more clearly illustrate key points.

⁸⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

⁸⁵ SJ 110, Watson p. 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

(was) ... an important symbol of ... submission'.⁸⁸ The story also says much about the courage and resourcefulness of the youthful Maodun, who was poised to become not only the nemesis of both the Yuezhi and the Han, but also one of the most potent rulers in the history of ancient Central Asia.

209 - 174 BCE: Reign of Maodun⁸⁹ as *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu

From 209 BCE: Maodun becomes *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu

'Maodun had some arrows made that whistled in flight, and used them to drill his troops in shooting from horseback. "Shoot wherever you see my whistling arrow strike!", he ordered, "and anyone who fails to shoot will be cut down" ... Accompanying his father, the *Shanyu* Louman, on a hunting expedition, he shot a whistling arrow at his father and every one of his followers aimed their arrows in the same direction and shot the *Shanyu* dead. Then Maodun executed his stepmother, his younger brother, and all the high officials of the nation who refused to take orders from him, and set himself up as the new *Shanyu*.'⁹⁰

Maodun assumed the title of *Shanyu* in 209 BCE, and held it until his death in 174. Using the evident skill and personal loyalty of his highly disciplined retinue, as well as levies from the various Xiongnu tribes that accepted his hegemony, he began to extend Xiongnu power beyond its traditional heartland, conquering all of his neighbours and very quickly confronting the Han Dynasty as an equal.

c. 207 BCE: The Xiongnu defeat the Eastern Barbarians (Dong Hu)

'Then he (Maodun) mounted his horse and set off to attack the Eastern Barbarians, circulating an order throughout his domain that anyone who was slow to follow would be executed. The Eastern Barbarians had up until this time despised Maodun, and made no preparations for their defence; when Maodun and his soldiers arrived, they inflicted a crushing defeat, killing the ruler of the Eastern Barbarians, taking prisoner his subjects, and seizing their domestic animals'.⁹¹

The Eastern Barbarians (or Dong Hu) thus became the first group defeated by Maodun in the establishment of his empire. Pulleyblank and Ligeti have both argued that the Dong Hu were probably proto-Mongols who followed a semi-sedentised agrarian lifeway before adopting full-blown steppe-nomadism late in the 1st Millennium BCE. Following their defeat by Maodun they disappeared from the Han chronicles for a century. Towards the end of the Former Han period, however, when the Xiongnu became weakened, the Dunghu began again to play a significant role in Chinese frontier strategy against the Xiongnu.⁹²

c. 207 BCE: *Maodun launches a first raid against the Yuezhi*

'Then he (Maodun) returned and rode west, attacking and routing the Yuezhi, and annexed the lands of the ruler of Loufan and the ruler of Boyang south of the Yellow

⁸⁸ Ying-shih Yu, *Trade and Expansion in Han China* (Berkeley 1967) pp. 38 - 39.

⁸⁹ David Honey argues that the correct pronunciation for Maodun was actually *Modu*, in D. Honey, 'The Rise of the Hsiung-nu', *Zentralasiatische Studien* vol. 24 (1994) p. 23.

⁹⁰ SJ 110, Watson p. 134.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹² Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 452-4, and L. Ligeti, 'Le Fahghatch: Un dialecte de la langue sien-pi', in L. Ligeti, ed., *Mongolian Studies* (Amsterdam 1970) pp. 265-308.

River. Thus he recovered possession of all the lands which the Qin general Meng Jian had taken away from the Xiongnu. . . . Thus Maodun was able to strengthen his position, massing a force of over 300,000 skilled crossbowmen'.⁹⁴

'... but later, when Maodun became leader of the Xiongnu, he attacked and defeated the Yuezhi'.⁹⁴

⁹⁵ 'Then came the time when the *Shanyu* Maodun attacked and defeated the Yuezhi'.

This first attack against the Yuezhi was inconclusive, and certainly no rout. It would be another forty-five years before the Xiongnu were able to inflict a final 'knock out' blow, which is further evidence of both the previous and continuing strength of the Yuezhi dynasty. They were apparently able to withstand a serious and potentially fatal attack from a powerful enemy (Maodun with some 300,000 troops at his disposal) without being forced to give up any of their lands (for the *Shi Ji* does not name any Yuezhi territory in the list of lands taken possession of by Maodun). Ying Shih Yu is thus surely incorrect in suggesting that in this raid Maodun 'took much of the Gansu Corridor from the Yuch-chih'.⁹⁶ for there is no evidence to support such a conclusion. None the less, the fact that a people whom the Yuezhi had previously treated with contempt (and who only eight years previously had sent their heir apparent to them as hostage) had attacked and defeated them in what was clearly a major raid must have come as a considerable shock.

206 - 195 BCE: Reign of Gaozu (founder of the Han Dynasty)

c. 200 BCE: Maodun conquers the tribes to the north

'Shortly after the period described above, Maodun launched a series of raids to the north, conquering the tribes of Hunyu, Qushe, Dingling, Gekun and Xinli'.⁹⁷

... and defeats the Han forces under Gaozu at Mayi.

'At this time Gaozu, the founder of the Han, had just succeeded in winning control of the empire and had transferred Xin, the former king of Hann, to the rulership of Dai, with his capital at Mayi. The Xiongnu surrounded Mayi and attacked the city in great force, whereupon Hann Xin surrendered to them. . . . Emperor Gaozu led an army in person to attack (the Xiongnu) . . . Maodun feigned a retreat to lure the Han soldiers on . . . Maodun swooped down with 400,000 of his best cavalry, surrounded Gaozu . . . and held him there for seven days . . . Maodun eventually withdrew his men and went away, and Gaozu likewise retreated and abandoned the campaign, dispatching Liu Jing to conclude a peace treaty with the Xiongnu instead'.⁹⁸

Maodun was thus able to consummate his domination of the region by forcing all the nomadic and sedentary groups to the east, north and south (with the exception of the Yuezhi) to accept Xiongnu suzerainty, extending his realm considerably in all directions, and even forcing the Han to treat him as an equal and conclude a peace

⁹⁴ SJ 110, Watson pp. 135 - 6.

⁹⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

⁹⁶ HS 96A, 15A.

⁹⁷ Ying Shih Yu (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁹⁸ SJ 119, Watson p. 108.

⁹⁹ SJ 110, Watson pp. 135 - 9.

treaty with the Xiongnu. Following the near disaster at Mayi,¹⁰⁰ Gaozu had little option other than to adopt a policy that promoted peace through intermarriage and a regular exchange of goods. The Chinese were clearly confounded by Maodun, and even agreed to present a Han princess to the *Shanyu*, as well as to sign the treaty.¹⁰¹ This policy was subsequently adhered to by Gaozu's successors until the advent of Wudi more than half a century later, who adopted a more pro-active and aggressive policy towards the Xiongnu. But once Wudi's reign had ended, his successors immediately reverted to the less forceful foreign policy approach of Gaozu.¹⁰² Despite the treaty, relations between the Xiongnu and Han remained uneasy, with the Xiongnu frequently raiding across the border into China. None the less Gaozu's successor, Huidi, maintained the policy of his predecessor, and when Emperor Wen succeeded the Dowager Empress Lu to the throne in 179 he renewed the peace treaty within two years. Once peace had been concluded with the Han, and with no other rivals of any substance in the vicinity, the way was clear for the Xiongnu to renew hostilities against the Yuezhi.

194 – 188 BCE: Reign of Huidi

188 – 180 BCE: Reign of Dowager Empress Lu¹⁰²

179 – 157 BCE: Reign of Wendi

177 BCE: The Xiongnu 'Wise King of the Right' launches an 'unauthorised' raid against the Han.

'In the fifth month of the third year of his (Wendi's) reign, however, the Xiongnu Wise King of the Right invaded the region south of the Yellow River, plundering the loyal barbarians of Shang Province who had been appointed by the Han to guard the frontier, and murdering and carrying off a number of the inhabitants. Emperor Wen ordered the chancellor Guan Ying to lead a force of 85,000 carriages and cavalry to Graonu, where they attacked the Wise King of the Right. The latter fled beyond the frontier'.¹⁰³

176 BCE: *Maodun 'apologises' to the Han, then inflicts a major defeat on the Yuezhi*

'The following year the *Shanyu* sent a letter to the Han court which read "... the Wise King of the right ... without asking my permission, engaged in a skirmish with the Han officials, thus violating the pact between the rulers of our two nations ... Because

¹⁰⁰ The confrontation between Maodun and Gaozu is an excellent example of Sima Qian's 'multiple accounts' technique, in that at least eight different chapters of the *Shi Ji* deal with the incident – SJ 8, 56, 57, 93, 99, 110, 112 and 122. The details provided in each account vary according to the subject of the chapter. See Markley, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ On the subject of a Han princess being sent to the Xiongnu see Chun Shu Chang, 'War and Peace with the Hsiungnu in Early Han China', in *Essays in Commemoration of the Eightieth Birthday of Professor T'ao Hsi-sheng* (Ann Arbor 1979) p. 684.

¹⁰² See for example Jagchid and Symons (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Markley, in private correspondence, has argued that a great many official acts and correspondence from the reign of Empress Dowager Lu are missing. He has suggested to me that this was politically motivated, and that records from that reign were either sealed or ignored as a way of making the rule appear less legitimate, and thus justify Emperor Wen's seizure of power in 180 BCE. This has implications for the letter from the *Shanyu* received by Wen early in his reign (see below).

¹⁰⁴ SJ 110, Watson p. 140.

of the violation of the pact. I have punished the Wise King of the Hsueh-hsi and sent him west to search out the Yueh-shih people and attack them. Through the aid of Heaven, the excellence of his fighting man, and the strategy of his officers, he has succeeded in wiping out the Yueh-shih, slaughtering or forcing to submission every member of the tribe".¹⁰⁴

It is also worth including Enoki's (more literal) translation of the same passage, by way of comparison:

'Now I (Maodun) punished the Right Wise King, for reasons of violation of promise (to the Han) by (his) petty officials, and made him march westward to locate and conquer the Yueh-shih. By divine providence, officials and soldiers fought well, and horses were strong enough to destroy the Yueh-shih. We have killed them and conquered them...'.¹⁰⁵

... and impresses the Han by doing so

'When (the letter) was delivered to the emperor, he began deliberations with his ministers as to whether it was better to attack or make peace. The high officials all stated: "Since the *Shanyu* has just conquered the Yueh-shih and is riding on a wave of victory, he cannot be attacked".'¹⁰⁶

The Han officials wavered between a desire to attack the Xiongnu or to continue to observe the uneasy peace, but Maodun's victory over the Yueh-shih convinced them to maintain the peace treaty, despite the violation. The degree to which the Han officials were obviously impressed by the Xiongnu's second victory over the Yueh-shih provides additional evidence of the reputation of Yueh-shih strength, and their (the Han's) astonishment that such a powerful people could be defeated by the Xiongnu. Interestingly Maodun used an ostensibly unsanctioned violation of the Xiongnu-Han peace treaty by the 'Wise King of the Right' as an excuse to attack the Yueh-shih, apparently as punishment for the offending Wise King. This again might be interpreted as evidence of the continuing reputation of the Yueh-shih dynasty, even amongst the Xiongnu. If Maodun seriously intended to punish the Wise King for his misdemeanor by sending him to attack the Yueh-shih, it would surely only have been effective punishment if the raid was against a difficult and dangerous foe with which success would be difficult to achieve.

As was noted above, the Chinese sources make reference to twenty-four leading Xiongnu officials or 'ministers', of which the four most important were the 'Wise King of the Left', the 'Luli King of the Left', the 'Wise King of the Right' (who was responsible for the western regions which obviously included the Yueh-shih) and the 'Luh King of the Right'.¹⁰⁷ These officials controlled their own government bureaucracies, and each might be thought of as governors of the Xiongnu empire's four quarters. The positions were usually held by brothers or sons of the *Shanyu*, the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Jonathan Markley, in private correspondence, has suggested that one of the implications of much of the official correspondence from the reign of Empress Dowager Lu having been tampered with (see fn 102 above) is that the letter Wendi apparently received from the *Shanyu* in 176 may have actually been referring to events that took place some years earlier (during the reign of the Empress).

¹⁰⁵ K. Enoki, 'The Location of the Capital of Lou-lan and the Date of the Karashih Inscription', in *Memoirs of the research Department of Toyo Bunko* 22 (1963) pp. 125-171.

¹⁰⁶ SJ 110, Watson p. 141.

¹⁰⁷ See SJ 110, Watson p. 136, for example.

most senior (the 'Wise King of the Left') by the heir apparent. The 'Wise King of the Right' is not given any particular credit for the (perhaps unexpected) success of the attack on the Yuezhi, which was due more to 'the aid of Heaven, the excellence of the fighting men, and the strength of his horses', than to any particular strategy or ability of the Xiongnu governor.

Yet again, the Xiongnu's victory was far from conclusive (as Enoki's account indicates) for the Yuezhi then continued to dwell in the Gansu (apparently unmolested or at least unmentioned by the Han chroniclers) for another fourteen years. Ying Shih Yu again seriously misreads the textual evidence in arguing that it was following this 176 attack that the Yuezhi split into two factions, and that the Greater (or *Da*) Yuezhi migrated to the Ili Basin.¹⁰⁹ As will be shown below, this event must surely have occurred almost a decade and a half later. However, where the Yuezhi ruling dynasty would have been surprised by the first Xiongnu raid in 207, they would now no doubt have been seriously dismayed by this second and probably more serious attack. As Narain puts it, Maodun's boast to the Han that he had 'wiped out' the Yuezhi (although Enoki renders this simply as 'conquered') 'may have been an overstatement when it was made, but certainly this was the beginning of the end of the Yuezhi power in their homeland'.¹¹⁰ The Yuezhi ruling dynasty must now have begun to consider their options for the future – to stay and await further attack from the Xiongnu, to attempt a counterattack against this dangerous foe, or to migrate elsewhere in the face of this continuing threat from the potent Maodun. Then, two years later, the great *Shanyu* died, which may have tipped the scales in favour of staying and attempting to rebuild the Yuezhi power base.

174 BCE: Maodun dies and is succeeded by the Old *Shanyu*, Jizhu (Laoshang? Jiyu?)¹¹¹

'Shortly after this, Maodun died and his son Jizhu was set up with the title the Old *Shanyu*'.¹¹²

As his title suggests, Jizhu (probably the 'Wise King of the Left') was relatively advanced in age when he succeeded to the Xiongnu leadership. Maodun had been the 'heir apparent' in 215 (presumably already a young man, perhaps in his twenties) and had come to the 'throne' in 209. As such he had been heir apparent some forty-one years before his death, and reigned as *Shanyu* for thirty-five years. At the time of his death, then, he may well have been aged about sixty or older, meaning that Jizhu was perhaps in his forties when he assumed the 'throne'. Any hopes the Yuezhi (and Han) might have entertained that the death of Maodun might lead to a lessening of Xiongnu aggression were not to be realised, however, although Han Wendi was at least able to persuade Jizhu to maintain the joint policy of peace. None the less the Yuezhi may have been emboldened by the death of their feared enemy, and the accession of his

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, see also R. de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier: The Policies and Strategy of the Later Han Empire* (Canberra 1984) pp. 176–7 for a description of the division of the Xiongnu empire into four quarters, and the placement of conquered tribes within each.

¹¹⁰ Ying Shih Yu (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹¹¹ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹¹² See p. 30 below for discussion of Jizhu/Laoshang. The *Zhonghua Shimo* edition of the *Shi Ji* states that the second character of the *Shanyu*'s name should be pronounced as 'yu', hence *Shanyu Jiyu* (cf. L. D. Watson p. 14).

'old' son, for sometime soon after the succession they demonstrated renewed vigour and aggression by attacking their old eastern neighbours, the Wusun.

c. 173 (?):

The Yuezhi attack the Wusun who flee to the Xiongnu

(Zhang Qian wrote) 'When I was living among the Xiongnu I heard of Wusun, the king was entitled *Kunmo* and the *Kunmo*'s father was named Nantoumi. Originally Wusun had lived with the Da Yuezhi between the Qilian (mountains) and Dunhuang, and they had been a small state. The Da Yuezhi attacked and killed Nantoumi, seizing his lands, and his people fled to the Xiongnu ...'¹¹³

The Yuezhi had coexisted in the Gansu for some considerable time with the smaller semi-nomadic pastoralist state of the Wusun. As noted earlier in this chapter, Sima Qian located the Wusun to the east of the Yuezhi and west of the Xiongnu, i.e. at the eastern end of the Gansu,¹¹⁴ while Ban Gu placed them even closer to the Yuezhi, virtually sharing the same area.¹¹⁵ Pulleyblank considered the Wusun to be not only Indo-Europeans like the Yuezhi, but also Tocharian-speakers.¹¹⁶ If so it is not inconceivable that the Wusun were of similar ethnic ancestry to the proto-Yuezhi, related pastoral nomads who had arrived in the Gansu at more or less the same time. Perhaps each represented a different tribal entity or dynasty of the one supra 'cultural federation' of Indo-Europeans who had dwelt in the region for many centuries. For whatever reason, possibly in response to Wusun provocation (the latter perhaps emboldened by the success of the 176 Xiongnu raid against the Yuezhi), or as the result of some 'inter-neeine' dispute, possibly to better secure their defences against the Xiongnu following the devastating raid, or simply to acquire more arable land, the Yuezhi attacked the Wusun and killed their ruler, Nantoumi, forcing his people to flee further east to the Xiongnu for protection. According to the *Han Shu*, the Xiongnu *Shanyu* Jizhu loved and reared Nantoumi's young heir and successor, the 'infant *Kunmo*', and:

'... when he had come of age, (the *Shanyu*) delivered to the *Kunmo* his father's people. He had him lead troops and on several occasions he did so mentoriously'.¹¹⁷

The *Shi Ji*, despite confusingly (and incorrectly, as events in the Ili Basin some decades later indicate) crediting the attack on the Wusun to the Xiongnu, takes this story further:

'The *Shanyu* then made (the *Kunmo*) the leader of the people whom his father had ruled in former times, and ordered him to guard the western forts. *Kunmo* gathered together his people, looked after them and led them in attacks on the small settlements on the neighbourhood. Soon he had 20,000 or 30,000 skilled archers who were trained in aggressive warfare'.¹¹⁸

The attack on the Wusun in c. 173 BCE was thus a short-lived and somewhat hollow victory for the Yuezhi. Not only did they gain for themselves a future mortal enemy in Nantoumi's son, but the Xiongnu *Shanyu* was able to include the Wusun (and their

¹¹³ HS 61.4B.

¹¹⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 238.

¹¹⁵ HS 96B.2A.

¹¹⁶ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 458; and Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, pp. 9-39.

¹¹⁷ HS 61.4B.

¹¹⁸ SJ 123, Watson p. 238.

well-trained forces) in the greater Xiongnu confederation, and take a personal interest in rearing and educating the new *Kimmu*. With 20,000 or 30,000 skilled archers 'trained in aggressive warfare', it comes as no surprise that the *Wusun* harassed the Yuezhi several decades later during their migration away from the Gansu, and forced them further to the west, events detailed in the next chapter.

c. 172 (?) – 158 (?): Old Jizhu dies and is succeeded by 'Laoshang'¹¹⁹

At first sight there is an apparent inconsistency between the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* accounts concerning the date of the death of 'Old' Jizhu, and the identity of his successor. The *Han Shu* specifically names one 'Laoshang' as the Xiongnu *Shanyu* who so crushingly defeated the Yuezhi in 162 BCE, and turned their king's skull into a drinking cup: 'and the *Shanyu* Laoshang killed (the king) of the Yuezhi, making his skull into a drinking cup'.¹²⁰ This seems to imply that at some period between the accession of Jizhu in 174 and the final attack on the Yuezhi in 162, Jizhu had died and been succeeded by a (presumably) younger and more vigorous *Shanyu* named 'Laoshang'. But the *Shi Ji* has no mention of Laoshang, and dates the death of Jizhu to 158: 'Four years later (following the peace treaty of 162) the Old *Shanyu* Jizhu died and was succeeded by his son Junchen'.¹²¹ This is more or less confirmed by a passage in Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji*: 'Sometime afterwards his (Maodun's) son, the Old *Shanyu*, killed the king of the Yuezhi ...'.¹²²

This apparent confusion is surely cleared up by reading 'Laoshang' as an epithet, not a name. As Hulsewe and Loewe note, '*Lao-shang*' translates to 'old and elevated', meaning that it is hardly likely to have been the actual name of the *Shanyu*, and was more probably a translation into Chinese of a Xiongnu epithet or title for Jizhu.¹²³ Thus Laoshang was not the name of a new ruler, but an alternative title for 'Old' Jizhu, in which case there never was a *Shanyu* named Laoshang, and the Yuezhi were ultimately defeated by Jizhu. Somewhat confusingly Hulsewe and Loewe appear to continue to accept Laoshang as the name of a new Xiongnu *Shanyu*,¹²⁴ but Narain is surely correct in arguing that *Laoshang* is simply the title of Jizhu.¹²⁵

166 BCE: The Han and Xiongnu resume hostilities – Xiongnu attack the Chinese at Beidi¹²⁶

'In the fourteenth year of Emperor Wen's reign the *Shanyu* led a force of 140,000 horsemen through the Chaona and Xiao passes, killing San Ang, the chief

¹¹⁹ HS 61.4B; SJ 123, Watson p. 238 (See Hulsewe and Loewe p. 214, n. 803 for a discussion of the apparent contradiction in the accounts of this episode between the *Shi Ji* and the *Han Shu*)

¹²⁰ HS 96A.15A.

¹²¹ SJ 110, Watson p. 147.

¹²² SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹²³ Hulsewe and Loewe, *op. cit.*, p. 120, n.284. An alternative translation could be 'Venerable Supreme *Shanyu*'.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹²⁶ Torday argues that for the Xiongnu to attack the Han heartland during this campaign, it would have been necessary for the *Shanyu* to 'cut his way through the much-weakened Yueh-shih', in Torday *op. cit.* p. 230. He thus links this Xiongnu attack on the Han with the final, devastating defeat of the Yuezhi, which resulted in their migration out of the Gansu. However that defeat must be dated to 162 and there is no textual evidence to support Torday's contention that the 166 Xiongnu attack on the Han coincided with the third and final attack on the Yuezhi.

commandant of Beih Province, and carrying off large numbers of people and animals. Eventually he rode as far as Pengyang ... and dispatched scouts as far as the Palace of Sweet Springs in Yong'.¹²⁷

This serious incursion actually brought the Xiongnu to within sight of the Han Capital at Xian. As Torday comments: 'Unlike earlier raids on China from the north or northwest, this was an attack on the Han heartland from an unexpected western direction'.¹²⁸ The Emperor Wen was able to mount a force of 100,000 horsemen to 'guard the capital from barbarian invaders',¹²⁹ and after harassing the region for over a month the Xiongnu withdrew. This raid marked the beginning of a four-year period of hostile activity by the Xiongnu against the Han that was only concluded by the signing of a new Han-Xiongnu peace treaty in 162.

'The Xiongnu grew more arrogant day by day, crossing the border every year, killing many of the inhabitants, and stealing their animals ... in Dai Province alone over 10,000 persons were killed. The Han court, greatly distressed, sent an envoy with a letter to the Xiongnu, and the *Shanyu* in turn dispatched one of his household administrators to apologise and request a renewal of the peace alliance'.¹³⁰

162 BCE:

Han Wendi writes to the Xiongnu requesting peace

'Our two great nations, the Han and the Xiongnu, stand side by side. Since the Xiongnu dwell in the north, where the land is cold and the killing frosts come early, we have decreed that our officials shall send to the *Shanyu* each year a fixed quantity of millet, leaven, gold, silk cloth, thread floss and other articles ... When we consider past affairs we realise that it is only because of petty matters and trifling reasons that the plans of our ministers have failed. No such matters are worthy to disrupt the harmony that exists between brothers ... Let us then cast aside these trifling matters of the past and walk the great road together ...'.¹³¹

The Han offer of peace (accompanied by a regular supply of tribute) was accepted, which appears to have allowed the *Shanyu* almost immediately to turn his attention to the Yuezhi. Narain agrees that it was only after concluding peace with the Han that the *Shanyu* considered it prudent to attack the Yuezhi, in that they potentially remained 'a powerful ally' of the Han.¹³² There is no textual evidence to suggest that the Xiongnu were ever genuinely concerned about a potential alliance between the Han and the Yuezhi, but immediately peace had been secured with the Han the *Shanyu* apparently felt sufficiently confident to turn what was no doubt a significant component of the Xiongnu forces against the Yuezhi in an attempt to defeat once and for all their Tocharian-speaking enemies. That attack can therefore be dated with reasonable accuracy to 162 BCE, a date further supported by a series of inferences drawn from the textual references.

162 BCE:

The Xiongnu under Jizhu inflict a third and more devastating defeat on the Yuezhi, and turn the king's skull into a drinking cup

¹²⁷ SJ 110, Watson p. 145.

¹²⁸ Torday *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ SJ 110, Watson p. 145.

¹³¹ SJ 110, Watson pp. 146-7.

¹³² Narain (1988) *op. cit.*, p. 23.

'At this time (*qianmin* era 140-135 BCE) the emperor questioned those Xiongnu who had surrendered to the Han and they all reported that the Xiongnu had defeated the king of the Yuezhi people and made his skull into a drinking cup.'

'At the time (*qianmin* era) deserters from the Xiongnu had said that they had defeated the king of the Yuezhi and made a drinking vessel of his skull'.¹³¹

Both references come from chapters in the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* on the diplomatic mission of Zhang Qian, who was sent out by Wudi in c. 138 BCE in an attempt to form an alliance with the Yuezhi. By the time the Han envoy caught up with the Yuezhi they had already completed their migration to the west and were settled in northern Bactria. The implication of these references is that the Han only found out about this ultimate defeat of the Yuezhi sometime after 140 BCE, more than two decades after the event, a serious failing in Han intelligence that will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. As such they provide only a very late *terminus post quem* for dating the defeat. They clearly suggest, however, that the Xiongnu had effectively cut off Han communication with the Gansu, and that the Han were totally dependent on accounts from Xiongnu deserters, captives or informants to obtain (much delayed) news of events in that region. There are additional references to the attack:

'... and the *Shanyu* Laoshang killed (the king) of the Yuezhi, making his skull into a drinking vessel'.¹³²

'Sometime later his (Maodun's) son, the Old *Shanyu*, killed the king of the Yuezhi and made his skull into a drinking cup'.¹³³

These references provide a more accurate *terminus post quem* for the defeat in that we know from the *Shi Ji* that Jizhu (Laoshang) died in 158 BCE, and was replaced as *Shanyu* by Junchen.¹³⁴ Therefore the defeat of the Yuezhi must have occurred sometime between the death of Maodun in 174 and the death of Jizhu in 158.

'At the time the Yuezhi had already been defeated by the Xiongnu ...'.¹³⁵

This passage follows the *Han Shu* account of the defeat of the Wusun by the Yuezhi and the flight of the infant *Kunmo* to the Xiongnu *Shanyu* which, as concluded above, most probably occurred in 173 BCE. The tale describes the education of the young *Kunmo* at the hands of Jizhu, and states that 'when he had come of age (the *Shanyu*) delivered to the *Kunmo* his father's people ...'.¹³⁶ Daffina has translated the relevant Chinese character as 'adult age' and used examples in the handbook on ritual, the *Lizhi*, to argue that adult age was 30.¹³⁷ But Hulsewe and Loewe dispute this conclusion and note that the *Hou Han Shu* states: 'Anciently one was given arms at

¹³¹ SJ 123, Watson p. 231.

¹³² HS 61 1A.

¹³³ HS 96A 15A.

¹³⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹³⁵ SJ 110, Watson p. 147.

¹³⁶ HS 61 5A.

¹³⁷ HS 61 4B.

¹³⁸ P. Daffina, 'La migrazione dei Wu-sun', in *Rivista degli studi orientali* 44 (Rome 1970).

15, to return these at sixty'.¹⁴¹ If they are correct, then the *Kunmo* (if he was aged one or less at the time of his father's death) would have reached the age of 15 by c. 158. However the *Han Shu* states that by the time the *Kunmo* had come of age, the Yuezhi 'had already been defeated by the Xiongnu', and further implies that they had already settled in the Ili Valley by then. This confirms that the defeat of the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu must have taken place sometime before 158.

A more precise *terminus post quem* can also be provided by the fact that in or immediately after 162 Jizhu signed a peace treaty with the Han and thereafter apparently remained at home for the rest of his life. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the third and final defeat of the Yuezhi at the hands of the Xiongnu most probably took place in 162 BCE, just before the signing of this peace treaty. With the defeat and expulsion of the Yuezhi, and the concluding of peace with the Han, Jizhu was able to spend the remaining four years of his life in relative tranquillity, content in the knowledge that the Xiongnu had now gained control of the vital Gansu Corridor, and hence potentially of the Tarim Basin beyond.

Torday has suggested that the Xiongnu cavalry probably used the fertile Etsin Gol valley as their route to the Yuezhi:

'All later invasions of Kansu from the north were to follow this route. Chingiz Khan used it in 1226 when it took him only forty days to lead his army from the Orkhon river to the Etsin Gol delta which was still a rich agricultural region; Marco Polo paused here for a little time and wrote about its capital, Etsina City, in glowing terms. Riding south, upstream along the Etsin Gol, the Hsiung-nu were perfectly positioned for pinning the Yueh-chih against the Ch'i-lien mountains. From here, the remnants of the defeated army and camp-followers would be compelled to flee west, the only direction still open to them'.¹⁴²

For the next thirty years west would remain the only directional option open to the displaced and essentially homeless Yuezhi, as this book's narrative will attempt to demonstrate.

Textual Evidence: Conclusion

By 162 BCE, then, the Yuezhi found themselves at their lowest political and military ebb – defeated and leaderless:

'... the Xiongnu conquered the Da Yuezhi ...'.¹⁴³

'... after they (the Yuezhi) were defeated by the Xiongnu ...'.¹⁴⁴

'The king of the Da Yuezhi had been killed by nomads ...'.¹⁴⁵

These passages only confirm what the previous references had already made abundantly clear – that the Yuezhi had suffered a third and final devastating attack at the hands of the Xiongnu under *Shanyu* Jizhu (Laoshang) and had been defeated

¹⁴¹ HHS Mem. 37. 10b; Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, pp. 215-6 n. 806.

¹⁴² Torday *op. cit.*, p. 234.

¹⁴³ HS 96A. 10B.

¹⁴⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁴⁵ HS 61. 2A; SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

utterly. The king of the Yuezhi dynasty had been killed and his skull transformed into a drinking cup trophy for the *Shanyu*. The Yuezhi, who until the advent of Maodun in 209 BCE had for centuries if not millennia been the most powerful of all the 'barbarian' peoples along China's northern and western borders, had now suffered three calamitous defeats in succession at the hands of the Xiongnu – in 207, 176 and 162. Ever since the first raid by Maodun in 207, the Yuezhi must have become increasingly aware of the shift in the balance of power that was occurring in the region, and no doubt had found themselves marginalised as the power struggle shifted to the Han-Xiongnu theatre. The fact that Maodun then waited another three decades before again attacking the Yuezhi probably indicates his preoccupation with the Han, but might also be interpreted as further testament to the previous (and continuing) power, reputation and strength of the Yuezhi.

In 176, the *Shanyu* had sent the 'Wise King of the Right' to 'search out the Yuezhi people and attack them', and was able to boast in a letter to the Han that he had succeeded in 'wiping out the Yuezhi, slaughtering or forcing to submission every member of the tribe'.¹⁴⁶ But the destruction of his enemies was not as great as Maodun claimed, and for the next fourteen years the Yuezhi had remained in occupation of the western Gansu. This was no doubt an uneasy period in the face of continuing Xiongnu strength and aggression, but the Xiongnu seem to have been further distracted by their relationship with the Han, or else were once again deterred from attacking the Yuezhi by the remnant strength of their forces. Indeed the Yuezhi must have retained (or quickly regained) a considerable military ability, for in 173 they attacked and expelled their eastern Gansu neighbours, the Wusun, who had not inconsiderable military resources of their own to call on. The fact that the Yuezhi were in any sort of position at all to harass the Wusun so soon after being apparently 'wiped out' by the Xiongnu is a striking testament to their powers of recovery, and also perhaps to their ability to draw for assistance on other loyal elements of their wider confederation from their territory in the Tarim Basin.

Then finally, most probably in 162 BCE, the Xiongnu launched their third and most devastating attack of all, this time utterly defeating the Yuezhi, decapitating their king and leaving them devastated. It was an event that the Han were not destined to hear of until sometime after 140 BCE, more than two decades later. By then the Yuezhi had taken the only possible course available to them and migrated far to the north west, resettling in what they hoped would be a new permanent homeland in the Ili Basin. Events were to confound those hopes, however, as will be shown in the next chapter.

V

Archaeological Evidence of the Yuezhi in the Gansu

Introduction

As already suggested in this book, any temptation to argue that the Chinese sources provide conclusive evidence for the compelling account they offer of events along China's northern borders during the first half of the second century BCE must be

¹⁴⁶ SJ 119, Watson p. 141

tempered by a dearth of corroborative archaeological evidence from the Gansu and Xinjiang. Further to the north, at a number of sites in former Soviet Central Asia, Soviet, Russian and Central Asian archaeologists have undertaken extensive research throughout the second half of the twentieth century, unearthing evidence of nomadic migrations and interaction upon the steppes. Most of the account of Bronze Age migrations outlined in Chapter One is based on Russian archaeological evidence, for example. And for the story of the Yuezhi's migration to the west following their expulsion at the hands of the Xiongnu in 162 BCE, archaeological evidence is also becoming increasingly useful as a means of verifying and fleshing out the bare itinerary details contained in the sources. That these essentially political histories, concerned mainly with Han domestic and foreign policy, are limited as a source of evidence for the culture and lifeway of ancient nomads is hardly surprising, which serves only to further emphasise the importance of any relevant archaeological discoveries. This is the point made by Natalya Gorbunova, who notes that the literary sources provide only:

'the bare facts of political history, and are concerned with the interrelations between the nomads' world and ancient state formations. Very little information about the economy, way of life, and culture of nomad tribes can be gleaned from them. This makes archaeology - notwithstanding its limitations of specificity - the main source of data for reconstructing the nomads' cultural history'.¹⁴⁷

Most of this archaeological evidence comes from cemeteries, and occasionally from the sites of temporary, semi-permanent and occasionally surprisingly permanent encampments. Evidence from burial sites is limited because the nature of the funeral rites that preceded interment are generally unknown, organic material is hardly ever preserved (with the obvious exception of the Tarim Mummies) and most of the burial sites of ancient Inner Asia have been plundered. This tends to reduce the value of much of the archaeological material, which means that, even where nomadic burial sites have been discovered and attributed, our knowledge of the culture and lifeways of the ancient pastoral tribes remains limited. However, by combining the evidence of literary references, no matter how incidental they might be, with even this limited archaeological evidence, an increasingly comprehensive picture of nomadic culture is beginning to emerge.

Xiongnu Archaeology and Iconography

The three principal 'nomadic' groups whose histories intertwine so compellingly in the Chinese histories are obviously the Xiongnu, the Wusun and the Yuezhi. Although identification of Xiongnu tombs and semi-permanent settlements was initially (albeit tentatively) made over a century ago, the attribution of Wusun and Yuezhi cemeteries has remained a far more difficult proposition. The first Xiongnu sites were discovered around Kyahta (now in the Buryatia Republic of the Russian Federation) by Tarko-Grinzevich in 1896.¹⁴⁸ The major site of Noin-Ula¹⁴⁹ (which

¹⁴⁷ N.G. Gorbunova, 'Early Nomadic Pastoral Tribes in Soviet Central Asia During the First Half of the First Millennium A.D.', in G. Seaman, ed., *Foundations of Empire: Archaeology and Art of the Eurasian Steppes* vol. 3 (Berkeley 1993) p. 31.

¹⁴⁸ For an excellent and very recent survey of Xiongnu archaeology see S. Minnaye, 'Art and Archaeology of the Xiongnu: New Discoveries in Russia', in *Circle of Inner Asian Art Newsletter* No. 14 (December 2001) pp. 3-9.

dates to the first century BCE) was first excavated between 1924 and 1925 by Kozlov, and more recently an important fortress has also been excavated by Davydova at Ivolga, about 16 kilometres from Ulan-Ude in the Selenga Valley.¹⁵⁰

These two principal Xiongnu settlements (as well as another twenty or so smaller sites in Mongolia)¹⁵¹ display evidence of fixed dwellings and fortified settlements. Recovered artefacts have revealed evidence of advanced craftsmanship, particularly rug-weaving technology, leather-making tools and fine iron and bronze implements, as well as semi-sedentary agricultural activity, all of which has caused researchers to alter substantially their previously held impressions of the exclusively 'nomadic' Xiongnu lifeway. This evidence obviously suggests that elements of the Xiongnu apparently followed a far more sedentary lifeway than is outlined in the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu*,¹⁵² although Murphey is probably still correct in claiming that 'for most (nomadic) people agriculture was either taboo, or practiced somewhat half-heartedly and even shamefully'.¹⁵³ None the less there is clear evidence of semi-sedentism and agriculture, and as Gorbunova has quite rightly suggested, had these sites not been unearthed, 'our knowledge of the culture and way of life of the peoples who buried their dead in these barrows would have been very different from what it is now'.¹⁵⁴ Some of the 54 houses so far excavated at Ivolga even had heating systems carried through ducts under the floors, and the settlement was heavily fortified, surrounded by four separate ramparts.

A point that Gorbunova perhaps overlooks, however, is that major Xiongnu settlements like Noin-Ula and Ivolga were elite dwellings or garrison towns, and do not necessarily tell us that much about how the 'ordinary' Xiongnu lived. As such these discoveries have often served to distort rather than clarify cultural and social issues. An example of this is the apparent significance of symbolic iconography which appears as ornamentation on personal artefacts discovered in Xiongnu (and other nomadic) tombs. Emma Bunker has argued that apparent changes in the iconography of symbols represented on these artefacts can be detected from the second half of the fourth century BCE, associated with the relatively 'sudden' appearance of raptor-heads:

'Fantastic animals with raptor-headed appendages began to be depicted on personal ornaments. At first the new iconography manifested itself in the addition of raptor heads ... Mythical animals with raptor-headed attributes are associated traditionally with ancient nomadic tribes located further west in Central Asia and northwestern Asia. These mythical creatures with raptor-head appendages belong to a poorly

¹⁴⁸ On Noin-Ula see C. Trever, *Excavations in Northern Mongolia* (Leningrad 1932), N. Ishiyama *op. cit.*, pp. 152, 159-163, S. I. Rudenko, *Kul'tura khunov i nomadskie kurgany* (Moscow and Leningrad 1962).

¹⁴⁹ On Ivolga see L. Lesnichenko, 'The Huns', in V. N. Basilov, ed., *Nomads of Eurasia*, trans. M. Zirin (Seattle and London 1989) p. 50; A. V. Davydova, *Ivolginskii kompleks (gorodische i mogilnik) - pamyatnik khunov v Zabaiكال'e* (Leningrad 1985) pp. 6, 83-4; A. Davydova, *Ivolga Fortress Archaeological Sites of the Xiongnu* vol. 1 (St. Petersburg 1995); A. Davydova, *Ivolga Cemetery Archaeological Sites of the Xiongnu* vol. 2 (St. Petersburg 1996).

¹⁵⁰ See for example S. Miniaev, *Derestny Burial Ground Archaeological Sites of the Xiongnu* vol. 3 (St. Petersburg 1998).

¹⁵¹ In *Shi Ji* 70, however, there is a description of the 'capital' of the *Mumyu*, which Miniaev argues matches that of Ivolga. See Miniaev 2001 *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁵² R. Murphey, 'An Ecological History of Central Asian Nomadism' in Seaman, ed. *Ecology and Empire* (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁵³ Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 46, n. 1.

understood symbolic system employed by certain pastoral tribes between the seventh to sixth centuries BC and the first century AD throughout the Eurasian steppes from Bulgaria to the Great Wall'.¹⁵⁵

The earliest known example of raptor-headed appendages is from a seventh or sixth century BCE tomb at Chiliktin in Eastern Kazakhstan, which Bunker attributes to the Sakas. The Xiongnu may have become increasingly preoccupied with raptor-head iconography, at least up until the era of their expansion under Maodun. Thereafter, Bunker suggests, raptor-head iconography was replaced with a renewed interest in symbolic representations of 'real' animals and humans: 'This change in subject matter reflects adoption of mythical beliefs different than those of the pre-Xiongnu conquest of pastoral tribes in the northwestern Chinese border areas'.¹⁵⁶ That contact with other pastoral tribes of different ethnicity and tradition should lead to the transference of new cultural influences is hardly surprising, and as the Xiongnu brought a large number of disparate groups under their control in this era of expansion, they would undoubtedly have adopted certain of the iconographical symbols associated with other cultural traditions for their personal use.

However Bunker, on the basis of this interpretation, goes on to equate the emergence of raptor-head iconography on Xiongnu artefacts with an implied very late appearance by the Yuezhi, or other Indo-European 'nomads'. She claims that Indo-European tribes may well have been responsible for the late-fourth century BCE introduction of raptor-headed creatures (i.e. may only have arrived in the region towards the end of the fourth century), arguing this based on an assumed correlation between the sudden disappearance of the symbols and the 162 BCE migration of the Yuezhi. Once the Yuezhi were expelled by the Xiongnu, she argues, 'the depiction of raptor-headed attributes decreased significantly, and the motif ultimately disappears from the artistic vocabulary of the area'.¹⁵⁷ The evidence for this proposed link is somewhat undermined, however, by the discovery of raptor-headed images on carpets excavated at Noin Ula which date from the first century BCE, a century or so after the Yuezhi had departed from the Gansu, and raptor-head images had supposedly 'disappeared' from the Xiongnu's 'artistic vocabulary'.

More persuasive is Bunker's suggestion that it was the Hu, the first group of nomadic archer warriors mentioned in the Zhou sources (who emerged along China's northwestern border during the 'Period of the Warring States') that should be regarded as candidates for the introduction of the raptor-head iconography. Indeed the Hu may have been responsible for a range of significant cross-cultural influences on their neighbours, including not only the Xiongnu but also the Chinese. It was 'Hu clothing' (*Hu fu*) and military techniques that were adopted, only after a long and 'famous' debate,¹⁵⁸ by the rulers of the Zhao late in the fourth century in their attempts to defend their territory from the aggression of the militarised nomadic invaders.¹⁵⁹ The Hu's ethnicity has not been established, but links with earlier Scythic/Sakan ancestors (responsible for the raptor-headed images at Chiliktin?) are

¹⁵⁵ F.C. Bunker, 'Significant changes in Iconography and Technology amongst ancient China's northwestern pastoralist neighbours from the Fourth to the First Century BC', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 6 (1992) pp. 100-1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁵⁸ S. 143.

¹⁵⁹ See Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.* pp. 449-50.

not out of the question. But there is no evidence to suggest that the Hu might have been Indo-Europeans, not to support Bunker's tentative suggestion that the Hu might have been warrior nomads who came through the Gansu and joined the Yuezhi confederation, 'whose core group may have lived in the Gansu for centuries', although certainly neither scenario is out of the question.¹⁶⁰

Bunker's intriguing suggestions (admittedly based only on the speculative attribution, and impossible claims for 'exact' dating, of raptor-headed iconography on Xiongnu artefacts) is illustrative of the complexities of interpreting such ambiguous archaeological material. There is not even sufficient evidence to determine whether the Xiongnu themselves produced the artefacts with the raptor-head images, or whether they were acquired as tribute or booty from other tribes with whom they came into contact (either as conquerors or even trading partners). As such, the discovery of (probably) Saka/Scythian iconography artefacts found in Xiongnu tombs only goes to emphasise the astonishing levels of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange that took place in the region, particularly during periods of intense nomadic mobility.

Evidence for the Yuezhi: the 'Podboy' Tombs

What has been conspicuous by its absence during more than a century of research is archaeological evidence for the Yuezhi, particularly in northwestern China. However this has not stopped Russian and Central Asian archaeologists (in particular) from speculating on where such evidence might be unearthed in the future, as was noted in the previous chapter. Furthermore, over recent decades an increasing number of archaeological sites that had originally been ascribed to other nomadic pastoralists have been tentatively re-attributed to the Yuezhi – particularly during their migration to, and settlement in, Bactria – and this in turn has provided clues as to the nature and type of burials that need to be sought in the Gansu and Xinjiang to indicate similarly the presence of the Yuezhi dynasty there. To that end Professor Y.A. Zadneprovsky of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg has been attempting for some decades to establish a link between a particular type of Central Asian tomb – the '*podbai*' (or podboy) – and the Yuezhi, tracing the incidence of podboy tombs Ptolemy-like along the Yuezhi's known migration route. By way of concluding this account of political and military events in the 'history' of the Yuezhi dynasty between 209 and 162 BCE, then, and as an introduction to a discussion of their migration to the west which follows in Chapters Three and Four, this theory needs to be introduced here before being further explored below.

Zadneprovsky argues (and Gorbunova agrees) that there are essentially only three different principal types of 'nomadic' burial structures, and that all three are found at various locations throughout Central Asia. These tombs have provided a rich source of information for Soviet and Russian archaeologists, but attribution has always been difficult. As Gorbunova puts it, 'repeated attempts have been made by scholars investigating the nomadic pastoralists' cemeteries to identify one or another group of people buried there with a tribe or tribes known from the written sources'.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁶¹ Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 33.

However the coexistence of these types, not only in the same general region but often at the very same site, makes identification much more difficult.

'Hundreds of burial grounds have been studied within a vast area from Semirechie and Karafan in the north to the Amu Darya and Kopet Dagh in the south. The existence of different types of burials in the same region and even within the same burial site is a widespread phenomenon typical of the nomads of Eurasia. This makes the solution of the identification problem even more difficult.'¹⁶²

The 'history' of the endeavours of Soviet and Russian archaeologists in discovering, excavating and identifying these hundreds of burial grounds will be touched upon in the following chapters, because many of these discoveries have greater relevance to the subject of the migrational route of the Yuezhi. Of most interest are attempts by several researchers to attribute (and re-attribute) various funeral structures specifically to the Yuezhi. For example, burial sites discovered in Kirghizstan in 1928 and 1929 were originally identified as Wusun by Voevodovsky and Gryaznov, but by 1941 Terenozhkin was arguing that only some of the sites belonged to the Wusun, whereas others were burials of the original Sai (Sakan) residents expelled by the Yuezhi, and yet others might belong to the migrating Yuezhi themselves.¹⁶³ It was Mandelshtam who first proposed identifying the podboy tomb type as Yuezhi burials, correlating a number of podboy sites along the Yuezhi migration route (outlined in the Han sources).¹⁶⁴ Zadneprovsky agreed with Mandelshtam's attribution, and at the International Conference on the Kushans held in Dushanbe in 1968 he further proposed that podboy burials discovered in the Ili Basin, the Ferghana Valley, the Bukharan oasis and in northern Bactria all belonged to the Yuezhi.¹⁶⁵

A 'podboy' is a side chamber excavated in the long wall or shaft of a tomb. The chambers might be located in either the east or west wall (Type A) of the structure, or the north or south wall (Type B).¹⁶⁶ Type B podboys have been found in the Tien Shan and Semirechie, and also Ferghana and Bactria, while Type A is more common in Chorasmia, Sogdia and Bactria.

What is needed to reinforce this proposed attribution are examples of similar tombs from the Gansu and/or Tarim Basin, the 'historic' home of the Yuezhi. As Zadneprovsky himself put the problem:

'... such burial grounds with burials in podboys of Semirechie, Ferghana and Bukhara oasis were similar to the Tukhar group in northern Bactria, and (all) belonged to the Yuezhi. In order to accept this theory it is necessary to determine the character of burial structures in the original homeland of the Yuezhi, in Gansu Province and north China (where burials in podboys are found) as well as in the

¹⁶² Y.A. Zadneprovsky, 'Migration Paths of the Yuezhi Based on Archaeological Evidence', *Circle of Inner Asian Art Newsletter* No. 9 (April 1999) p. 3.

¹⁶³ For a discussion of these early attributions see *ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ See for example A.M. Mandelshtam, 'Proskhozhdenie i rannaya istoriya kushan v svete archeologicheskikh dannikh' (Archaeological Data on the Origins and early History of the Kushans), in *Central Asia in the Kushan Period* Vol. I, (Moscow 1974) pp. 165-6. (Text in Russian but with title and summaries in English).

¹⁶⁵ See Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.* p. 3; and Y.A. Zadneprovsky, *Ancient Nomads of Central Asia* (St. Petersburg 1997).

¹⁶⁶ Garbunova *op. cit.* p. 35.

intermediate territory, in Eastern Turkestan (present Xinjiang Autonomous region P.R.C.).¹⁶⁷

The Russians, with no access to these regions, have been forced to depend on research carried out by Chinese archaeologists in the Gansu and Xinjiang, and in 1990 Miniaev published a paper comparing podboy-like burial sites uncovered by the Chinese in Daodongzi in Ningxia Province, and at Subashi in Xinjiang, with similar sites excavated in Tuva and in the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia.¹⁶⁸ But all of these burials have so far been ascribed to indigenous residents of those regions who came under Xiongnu hegemony in the mid-second century BCE. More promising perhaps are tombs unearthed at a number of Chinese sites, including Charwighul in Xinjiang and Haladun in the Gansu.

Charwighul

The Charwighul site is located 30 kilometres northwest of Qarashahar (Hedjo) on the southern slopes of the Tien Shan in the northern Tarim Basin. The culture that emerged there has been dated to c. 1000–400 BCE, and is regarded by Mallory and Mair as the 'prehistoric predecessor ... to the state of Qarashahar, one of the garrison towns of the northern Tarim region'.¹⁶⁹ Five cemeteries have been excavated, spread over an area 10 kilometres long. A total of 2000 separate tombs have been unearthed and four of them are identifiably of the same culture (Charwighul I, II, IV and V). In these tombs the deceased were laid on their backs or sides, oriented to the northwest. The chambers were lined with stones, with a plank floor and sides on top. Grave goods include both coarse and painted pottery wares, wooden arrows, a bow and weaving objects, bronze knives and gold, silver and iron ornaments. The graves also yielded bronze horse-bits and other horse-riding materials, as well as the remains of sheep, horses and occasionally cattle, all of which indicates a lifeway based in part on oasis-based agriculture, but also on nomadism.¹⁷⁰ The burial sites at I, II, IV and V display parallels with seventh and sixth century Andronovan tombs of the Altai, and the horse-riding artefacts suggest a steppeland origin for the bulk of the interred. Zadneprovsky also identifies the burial structures at I, II, IV and V with the Sarmatian tribes of the southern Urals.¹⁷¹

It is Charwighul III, however, which Zadneprovsky finds of particular interest, and Mallory and Mair agree that these tombs clearly belong to a different mortuary tradition and material culture, and that the interred are of mixed Caucasoid ethnicity.¹⁷² Zadneprovsky argues for an identifiable link with the podboy tombs of the Ili Basin and Ferghana Valley:

'In many features, i.e. location of the niche (podboy) in the northern wall of the grave, latitudinal orientation of the skeleton, bricking up of the entrance to the podboy with raw bricks, they resemble the monuments of Semirechie and the neighbouring Ferghana regions'.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ See *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 157–8.

¹⁷¹ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁷² Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁷³ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Zadneprovsky finds a particular similarity between the Charwishul III tombs and those of the Khangiz ground in Ferghana (also tentatively ascribed to the migrating Yuezhi, as will be discussed below).¹⁷⁴ The Charwishul III site has been loosely identified as Xiongnu by Chinese archaeologists, but Mallory and Mair are not convinced,¹⁷⁵ and Zadneprovsky argues that they differ substantially from the typical Xiongnu burials 'in many features'.¹⁷⁶ Thus, whilst there is no clear evidence which allows for any sort of unequivocal identification of the Charwishul III site with the Yuezhi, there are sufficient 'clues' to at least speculate upon such an attribution. The ethnicity of the deceased, the burial customs and construction of the tombs themselves, as well as the material goods contained within them, indicate that they stem from a different cultural tradition to that contained in the other Charwishul sites.

That sites I, II, IV and V exhibit close links with Andronovan or Sarmatian Indo-Iranian nomadic cultures of the steppes to the north of the Tarim region seems well established. The culture represented at Charwishul III might therefore be identifiable as that of Indo-European-speaking (Tocharian) migrants, but not as Xiongnu, whose other monuments are demonstrably different. And if Zadneprovsky is correct in arguing for a striking similarity with other podboy burials from the Ili and Ferghana valleys (tentatively attributed to the Yuezhi) an identification of the Charwishul III culture with the Yuezhi-Tocharian becomes at least a possibility. Although the site is located some way west of the Yuezhi's 'historical' homeland in the Gansu, it is not difficult to envisage groups of the Yuezhi federation dwelling along the northern Tarim Basin route, particularly as the area was a stronghold of Tocharian-speaking peoples. Nor is the area out of the question as one possible residence for the *Ando* (or Little) Yuezhi who split from the main body following the defeat of the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu in 162, events described in the next chapter. However, the fact that the tombs have tentatively been dated to c. 200 CE creates a chronological problem for any such identification, although these dates are hardly conclusively established.

Haladun

Located closer to (although somewhat to the east of) the homeland of the Yuezhi (as described in the Chinese sources) is the Haladun cemetery, discovered by Chinese archaeologists near Minqin in the central Gansu.¹⁷⁷ This site is considered by Zadneprovsky to be potentially of 'utmost significance'.¹⁷⁸ In twelve out of eighteen graves so far discovered, burials are in podboy structures, with the bodies stretched out and oriented to the south, and their heads turned to the north. Podboy niches are found in the western wall of the tombs, and the entrances are bricked up. The bodies are accompanied by the remains of consecrated ritual food, including the heads of bulls, horses and sheep. This is similar to discoveries of ritual food made at some other podboy sites (tentatively ascribed to the Yuezhi by Zadneprovsky) in Central Asia, as will be considered below.

¹⁷⁴ On the Khangiz site see N.G. Gorbunova, *The Culture of Ancient Ferghana VI Century BC – VI Century AD* (British Archaeological Reports, London 1986).

¹⁷⁵ Mallory and Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁷⁶ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ *Kuang-Yueh-shan* 1992: 2 (See Zadneprovsky *ibid.*).

¹⁷⁸ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4. The Minqin 'Haladun' site should not be confused with the 'Haladun [Qaradong] culture' site located near the major northern Tarim Basin town of Kucha. The Haladun (Qaradong) see Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 145.

The burials have been radiocarbon dated to the Zhou 'Period of the Warring States' (c. sixth to fourth centuries BCE) – the era in which the Zhou sources suggest the Chinese and Yuezhi were in contact through the trade in jade. The correspondence of podboy structures, the central Gansu location of the site, the discovery of ritual foods and the Western Zhou period dating of the burials makes it highly tempting to ascribe the tombs to the Yuezhi. However, with a total of only eighteen podboy burials so far discovered in northern China, Zadneprovsky remains justifiably cautious in proclaiming Haladun as 'the first monument discovered in the original lands of the Yuezhi'.¹⁷⁹

In response to Zadneprovsky's tentative claims about the possible attribution of podboy tombs to the Yuezhi, Professor Enguo Lu of the Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology has been even more cautious.¹⁸⁰ Some Chinese archaeologists believe that remains and artefacts associated with the Shajing cultures, such as those discovered at the Sanjiaocheng site and the Hamadun cemetery in Yongchang, Gansu, might be attributable to the Yuezhi, but find it more difficult to agree with Zadneprovsky about tombs in Xinjiang. Enguo also notes that the Hamadun (Haladun) tombs in the Gansu (which may date to as early as the sixth century BCE) resemble tombs of similar construction and date that have also been discovered in Ningxia and Shaanxi provinces, which leads him to ask: 'Did the Yuezhi domination extend to those regions?'¹⁸¹ In addition to this problem, he believes the podboy tombs of Xinjiang display significant cultural differences to those discovered in the Gansu, and instead more closely resemble cemeteries found in the Turfan Basin that have been attributed to the Xiongnu. He also highlights the particular difficulties of attribution at sites where podboy tombs are mixed with other burial structures (particularly shaft graves). At Charwighul III there are 16 podboys among 40 shaft graves, and Subeixi Cemetery I has 13 podboys among 35, while Cemetery III contains only one podboy among 30 graves. Although obviously acutely aware of these problems, however, Enguo Lu is not prepared to entirely dismiss Zadneprovsky's thesis:

'In such a case where two types of graves often co-existed within a big or small cemetery, it would be rather difficult to consider them the remains of two different ethnic groups. If we follow the author's (i.e. Zadneprovsky's) conclusion that the graves with a cache or podboy burials are the remains of the Yuezhi, and the shaft graves are not, then how could we explain their co-existence? Therefore, when there are no written documents available, one should be especially cautious about relating the archaeological materials to ancient ethnic groups. Anyhow, Professor Zadneprovsky has put forward an important question worthy of further serious research and his materials and discussions are of high value to the study of Xinjiang's history'.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰ Enguo Lu, 'The Podboy Burials found in Xinjiang and the Remains of the Yuezhi' (June 2002), pp. 21-22.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 22.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

Clearly the jury remains very definitely out on the matter of archaeological evidence of the Yuezhi in the Gansu and Tarim Basin. More convincing perhaps is the evidence of podboy tombs found at various locations along the Yuezhi's migration route, as a consideration of these discoveries in Chapters Three and Four will indicate.

VI

Conclusion: The Yuezhi in the Gansu

The *Han Shu* and the *Shi Ji* provide compelling textual evidence of the dramatic events that took place along China's northern and northwestern borders during the first half of the second century BCE. When read together, the histories contain sufficient material to reconstruct a coherent narrative of those events, particularly of the circumstances in which the Yuezhi went from being the most powerful of all Han China's neighbours to a confederation in forced exile. The rise of Maodun allowed for a Xiongnu resurgence (and a later Wusun consolidation) which left the once powerful and wealthy Yuezhi dynasty with little option other than to migrate away from the Gansu. Such a narrative, with only limited recourse to the sort of detailed references catalogued above, would read as follows:

The Yuezhi had originally dwelt in the Gansu between Dunhuang and the Qilian or Heavenly Mountains.¹⁸³ The sources claim that they were a nation of nomads, moving round 'in company with their stock animals' (or herds), and their customs and way of life were similar to those of the Xiongnu,¹⁸⁴ but it is more likely that the Yuezhi (like the Xiongnu) followed a semi-sedentary oasis-based agriculturist-pastoralist lifeway. They co-existed in the region with the smaller nomadic state of the Wusun, who may also have been Indo-European speakers.¹⁸⁵ With at least some 100,000 trained archer warriors (a figure that at the very least indicates a substantial armed force) the Yuezhi were clearly powerful and relied on their military strength. They disdained (or even despised)¹⁸⁶ their neighbours the Xiongnu who, under the leadership of *Shanyu* (chieftain) Touman, had been forced to migrate to the north in c. 220 BCE after combined pressure from the 'flourishing' Yuezhi, the Eastern Barbarians and the Chinese Qin.¹⁸⁷

Subsequent to this migration, and in an attempt to secure succession for a younger son from a favoured consort, the *Shanyu* Touman sent his oldest son Maodun as a hostage to the Yuezhi, further evidence of the Yuezhi's status as a significant regional power at that time. After Maodun had arrived amongst the Yuezhi, Touman suddenly attacked the Yuezhi (in the hope that they would kill Maodun in retaliation), but he escaped before the Yuezhi could execute him by stealing one of their best horses and eventually made his way home. His father, impressed by his son's bravery, put him in command of a force of 10,000 cavalry.¹⁸⁸ In 209 BCE Maodun assassinated his father Touman, and established himself as the new *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu. Maodun then set about increasing Xiongnu power by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Eastern

¹⁸³ HS 96A 15A, SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁵ HS 96B 1B.

¹⁸⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁸⁷ SJ 110, Watson p. 134.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

Barbarians. He also launched an initial raid on the Yuezhi. 'Then he returned and rode west, attacking and routing the Yuezhi ...'.¹⁸⁹ Maodun massed a force of over 300,000 skilled crossbowmen, and the Xiongnu were in the ascendancy, conquering tribes in the north and east and treating Chinese forces with disdain: 'When Maodun came to power ... the Xiongnu reached the peak of their strength and size subjugating all other barbarian tribes of the north and turning south to confront China as a rival nation'.¹⁹⁰ For the next thirty years or so, the Xiongnu and the Chinese maintained an uneasy relationship characterised by Xiongnu arrogance and Qin (at first), and then Han dismay.

In 176 BCE Maodun wrote to the Han Emperor Wen describing a campaign of the previous year to defeat the Yuezhi: '(I have sent) the "Wise King of the Right" ... to search out the Yuezhi people and attack them ... he has succeeded in wiping out the Yuezhi, slaughtering or forcing to submission every member of the tribe'.¹⁹¹ Again the Han wavered between a desire to attack the Xiongnu, or to maintain the uneasy peace. The senior Han advisors all stated: 'Since the *Shanyu* has just conquered the Yuezhi and is riding on a wave of victory, he cannot be attacked'.¹⁹² The degree to which the Han officials were clearly impressed by the Xiongnu's victory over the Yuezhi provides further evidence of the previous power and reputation of the Yuezhi themselves (pre-Maodun), and their (the Han's) astonishment that such a powerful people could be defeated by the Xiongnu. In 174 BCE Maodun died and was succeeded by his son, the 'Old' *Shanyu* Jizhu. The apparent destruction of the Yuezhi in 176 was not as great as Maodun had boasted, although their reprieve was to be relatively short-lived. In 140 BCE, reports from Xiongnu deserters (or informants) to the Han court claimed that some time earlier (most probably in 162) Jizhu had also attacked the Yuezhi and this time defeated them utterly, making the king's skull into a drinking cup.¹⁹³

The Yuezhi, prior to this ultimate defeat at the hands of the Xiongnu, had in turn treated their weaker Gansu neighbours, the Wusun, with contempt. The Yuezhi had attacked and killed the Wusun *Kunmo* (chieftain) Nantoumi, and seized his lands. This had forced the Wusun to flee to the Xiongnu for protection, and the Xiongnu *Shanyu* had loved and reared the infant *Kunmo*. When he grew to manhood, the *Shanyu* 'delivered to the *Kunmo* his father's people; he had him lead troops, and on several occasions he did so meritoriously'.¹⁹⁴ The attack on the Wusun by the Yuezhi thus gained for the latter a powerful (and well-trained) enemy – Nantoumi's son and successor as *Kunmo* – who would later harass the Yuezhi during their migration westwards.¹⁹⁵

In 162 BCE, then, the Yuezhi dynasty was roundly defeated and their position in the Gansu rendered untenable, although the population (and military strength) of the tribes that followed them was far from decimated. There is almost no archaeological evidence available at this stage that supports the Chinese accounts, although the

¹⁸⁹ SJ 110, Watson p. 135.

¹⁹⁰ SJ 110, Watson p. 136.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁹³ SJ 123, Watson p. 231 and 234; HS 96 A 15A; HS 61 2A.

¹⁹⁴ HS 61 4B.

¹⁹⁵ HS 61 4B, SJ 123, Watson p. 238.

Haladun site near Minqin in the Gansu is perhaps the most promising. There is, however, little doubt of the changed fortunes experienced by the Yuezhi between 209 and 162 BCE, nor of the reality that the only option remaining to them was ultimately to migrate away from the Gansu, and to leave the geo-politics of China's northern and western borders to the Xiongnu, the Han and, to a lesser extent, the Wusun. The migration of the Yuezhi would take them far from this theatre of activity, and in the process of relocating they would carve out for themselves a new and even more significant role in the history of ancient Central Asia.

Chapter Three

The Migration of the Yuezhi Stage One: From the Gansu to the Ili Basin

Introduction

The history of ancient Central Asia has consistently been influenced by migration—on an often vast scale, and by the interaction of those migrants with the sedentary, agrarian settlements, kingdoms and civilisations already established in the region. Ever since the evolution of *Homo Erectus* some 1.6 MYA—the first hominid to migrate out of Africa and into Asia¹—and certainly since the appearance of *Homo Sapiens* perhaps 200,000 years ago, the valleys, steppes and desert tracks of Central Asia have acted as conduits along which successive waves of migrants have passed. And the emphasis really was on ‘passing through’, at least until comparatively recently, because even in the more benign ecological environments in the wide geography of Inner Asia, the generally harsh climate and forbidding terrain often made permanent settlement difficult, if not impossible. Claims made by pioneering Soviet archaeologists of evidence of very early hominine settlements in the Altai Mountains dating to c. 1.5 MYA are now treated with considerable scepticism, as are similar dates more recently suggested for settlements along the Lena River.² In fact the most reliable evidence available indicates that, before approximately 100,000 years ago there were at best only occasional attempts to settle even the more hospitable regions around the fringes of the Inner Asian heartland.

However, by the Upper Paleolithic Era (c. 50-40,000 BP) considerably more reliable archaeological evidence from an increasingly large number of sites ranging from the Ukraine to eastern Siberia and southern Mongolia indicates the presence of substantial numbers of hunter-gatherers dwelling in Central Asia.³ In the millennia that followed, such communities gradually adopted a semi-nomadic, semi-sedentised lifeway so that by the mid-fourth millennium Bronze Age, nomadic pastoralists from the southern Russian steppes (whose migrations were described in Chapter One) were confronted by, and forced to deal with, semi-agrarian communities and kingdoms already in occupation of the more fertile niches.⁴ The way in which that confrontation was

¹ Although there is no specific evidence I am aware of that indicates the presence of *Homo Erectus* in Central Asia, there is no doubt of their occupation of sites in East and Southeast Asia, notably Indonesia and the Zhonkoudian cave near Beijing.

² See for example V. Lantchev, U. Kholushkin and I. Lantcheva, ‘Lower and middle paleolithic of northern Asia: achievements, problems and perspectives’, *Journal of World Prehistory* (1983) vol. 1 (4) pp. 415-64.

³ For an excellent summary of evidence for the early occupation and settlement of Inner Asia see Christian (1998) *op. cit.* Chap. 2.

⁴ A recent study of this interaction between nomadic and sedentary societies in Inner Asia is P. Golden, ‘Nomads and Sedentary Societies in Eurasia’ in M. Atlas, ed., *Pastoral Societies in Ancient and Classical History: Critical Perspectives on the Past* (Philadelphia 2001).

involved might best be characterised as 'forced migration' – a process of displacement, occupation and cultural assimilation.

This tension between residents and invaders formed a major theme in the history of Inner Asia, a theme that recurs during the pre- and proto-historic era, in the centuries following the conquest of the south in Silyu and Mienchiang, and in the centuries following the migration of the 'Middle Asians' as the effect of the Mongol invasions of the sedentary kingdoms of Eurasia during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The relationship between pastoralists and farmers was necessarily confrontational. There was certainly some violent conflict, certainly, but one should not rule out the possibility of long periods of relatively stable, mutually cooperative relationships between the two. Indeed, the Yuezhi confederation itself seemed to consist of both pastoral nomads and sedentised agriculturists, all apparently coexisting under Yuezhi leadership.

The geography of Inner Asia remained a crucial determinant in all of this. With the available routes for large-scale movement limited by the frequent incidence of impassable desert and high mountain range, it was inevitable that the migration of a group or tribe into any given area would affect other communities already in occupation of sites along those routes. Thus a second characteristic of ancient Inner Asian history, and a consequence of the pastoral-nomad-sedentary-agriculturist dynamic, was a 'domino-effect' whereby any substantial migration from one region to another would often result in the disruption of a whole series of other groups ahead of the invading tribes. It hardly mattered what the cause of the original migration was. Once a group had chosen (or been forced) to uproot and relocate, they had few options other than to follow a very limited range of possible routes, and this inevitably brought them into conflict with other communities already settled along the selected path. If the invading party was strong enough, the occupants were expelled, and they in turn moved ahead along the same route, disrupting and expelling other communities until each had found a new location in which to resettle, or achieved some compromise with the 'invaders'. The thirty-year migration of the Da Yuezhi from the Gansu Corridor, northwest to the Ili Basin, and thence generally west and south through the Ferghana Valley and Sogdia to northern Bactria, is a quintessential example of this domino-effect – a forced migration of the bulk of a substantial tribal confederation that resulted in the displacement of a number of communities already in residence along that migratory path, and which as a consequence had an even more significant impact upon the subsequent course of Eurasian history.

The migration of the Da Yuezhi from 162 to 130 BCE, and the interaction that followed between the displaced Indo-Europeans and communities dwelling along their route – namely the Sakas of the Ili Valley, the Wusun, the Dayuans of the Ferghana Valley, the Kangjuans and other occupants of Sogdia, the Sakas of northern Bactria, and the Bactrians themselves – are the themes of this and subsequent chapters, and they will be explored through the detailed consideration of a range of evidence. As in all matters of Yuezhi 'history', while this evidence is often ambiguous and occasionally contradictory, a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the references to the migration and its effects in the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji*, supported by references in the *Geographica* of Ptolemy and the findings of a number of Russian and Central Asian archaeologists, is sufficient, I would contend, to produce a reasonably coherent chronological account. Each of the stages in the Yuezhi

migration, and the various groups with whom the Yuezhi were forced to deal as a result, will be considered in turn through an examination of this evidence. In summary, this account will suggest the following itinerary and time frame:

Chronology of Events

- 162 BCE: The Yuezhi were expelled from the Gansu by the Xiongnu. Most of the federation (the *Da* or Greater Yuezhi) migrated to north and west. Some of the Yuezhi, however (the *Xiǎo* or 'Lesser' Yuezhi) fled to the south and sought protection in present day Qinghai with the Qiang Barbarians.
- 162 BCE: Following the first stage of their migration, the *Da* Yuezhi settled somewhere along the extensive valley of the Ili River, either in far northwestern Xinjiang or over the border in present-day Kazakhstan, in the vicinity of Ysyk Kul. In so doing they displaced the resident Sakas who were forced in turn to migrate south. Many of these Sakas eventually settled (after an epic migration of their own) in Kashmir. Some of them remained in the Ili, however, and were assimilated into the Yuezhi confederation.
- 162 - c. 132 BCE: The Yuezhi remained in occupation of the Ili Valley.
- c. 132 BCE: The Wusun attacked the Yuezhi in the Ili Valley and forced them to resume their migration. Some groups from within the general Yuezhi community remained in the Ili Valley and, along with the remnants of the original Sakan residents, were in turn assimilated into the Wusun confederation.
- c. 132 BCE: The bulk of the *Da* Yuezhi migrated westwards into the Ferghana Valley (where they were assisted by the residents of Dayuan). The Yuezhi possibly spent some months of 132/1 in the Isfara interfluvial area of southwestern Ferghana.
- 131 BCE: In the spring of c. 131 the Yuezhi moved south and west into the Zeravshan Valley of Sogdia. They appear to have received assistance (or at least suffered no hindrance) from the Kangju dynasty, which was in control of Sogdia. They may have passed some months in 131/0 camped along the Middle Zeravshan, in the general vicinity of Samarkand.
- 130 BCE: The Yuezhi migrated south and occupied the Surkhan Darya valley to the north of the Amu Darya, expelling another group of Saka residents in the process. These Sakas were in turn forced southwards into Bactria 'proper'.

Migration of the Yuezhi (Stage One): From the Gansu to the Ili Basin

Xiongnu Motives in Expelling the Yuezhi

As the evidence discussed in Chapter Two indicated, following the succession of Maodun as *Shanyu* of the Xiongnu, the Yuezhi dynasty's relationship with the Xiongnu entered a period of fatal reversal. Eventually, after withstanding two substantial military offensives at the hands of Maodun, the Yuezhi suffered a third devastating defeat under Jizhu in 162 BCE.⁷ The motives of the Xiongnu for these concerted attacks upon the Yuezhi are not overtly stated in the sources but arguably, with the Yuezhi occupying a key strategic position in the Gansu Corridor, the Xiongnu were intent upon forcing them out to facilitate opening up the entire Tarim Basin to their own expansionary interests.

In fact the Yuezhi's lengthy occupation of the Gansu was at least partly responsible for their success as a dynasty, based as it possibly was upon the import of jade and horses into Zhou China during the first millennium BCE.⁸ By controlling the only feasible routes to the western Tarim, the Yuezhi were uniquely positioned to monopolise trade (or at the very least to act as middlemen), thus ensuring their prosperity and continuing military strength. But the Gansu, long recognised as a natural conduit between the steppes and river valleys of the north,⁹ northern China, and the Tarim Basin and the west, was a strategic location too important to ignore by the increasingly powerful Xiongnu. With the defeat and expulsion of the Yuezhi the Gansu came under Xiongnu control, and the theatre of the Han Xiongnu conflict then gradually began to shift west into the Tarim Basin.

An additional motive may have been that the Tarim Basin (even pre-'Silk Roads') contained a number of minor but quite wealthy city-states, and the control of the Gansu opened these states to the extraction of tribute by the Xiongnu. Indeed the possibility that the Yuezhi dynasty was also able to draw tribute from these oasis states during several centuries of dominance in the region should not be discounted, which would further account for their apparent wealth. Following the return to the Han court in 126 BCE of Zhang Qian (who was forced to pass through the occupying Xiongnu in the Gansu, as will be shown below) the Han also commenced an era of aggressive military and mercantile expansion into the 'Western Regions', perhaps also to be partly explained strategically as a way of cutting off the Xiongnu from their tribute source.¹⁰ The political and military history of eastern Central Asia for the next two centuries was then dominated by ongoing conflict between Xiongnu and Han forces as each attempted to gain control of the oasis-states of the Tarim Basin.¹¹ Without the expulsion of the Yuezhi in 162, the dramatic events that were played out between a succession of *Shanyus* and Chinese generals (including the astonishing Ban Chao) on the fringes of the Taklamakan Desert during the first centuries before and after the Common Era might very well not have occurred.

⁷ See for example Mao (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 143ff.

⁸ For a theoretical consideration of the bi-polar relationship between the Han and Xiongnu, see for example E. Bartfield, 'Inner Asia and Cycles of Power in China's Imperial Dynastic History', in G. Sedgwick (ed.), *Rulers from the Steppes: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Los Angeles 1991), pp. 2-31.

Narain suggests an additional motive – that the decision by the Xiongnu to attack the Yuezhi might also have been an attempt to forestall any potential strategic alliance between the Han and the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu:

‘Jizhu had not forgotten the Yuezhi, who were still living close to the Xiongnu and had been very powerful only a decade ago. It would have been foolish on the part of the Xiongnu to do so for they formed a potential ally with the Han’.

Certain references in both the *Han Shu* and the *Shi Ji* do seem to suggest that the Yuezhi were looking to form an alliance against the Xiongnu – (a ‘party with whom they could attack them jointly’;⁸ or someone to ‘join them in an attack upon their enemy’).⁹ And almost a quarter of a century later (in 138 BCE) Han envoy Zhang Qian was sent out by Wudi specifically to seek an alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu. Thus thoughts of an offensive alliance between the two most powerful enemies of the Xiongnu during the first four decades of the second century BCE were probably not far from Maodun’s and Jizhu’s minds, despite the signing of peace accords with the Han, including one between Jizhu and Wen in 162.¹⁰ Jizhu was already an old man (he would die four years later in 158) and may well have been determined to both defeat and expel the Yuezhi from the Gansu for strategic purposes, and head off any possibility of a Han-Yuezhi alliance at the same time, before the end of his reign as *Shanyu*. For the Yuezhi, however, any active involvement in the continuing relationship between the Han and the Xiongnu in either the Gansu or the Tarim Basin was over. Once the Yuezhi had been expelled by the Xiongnu, their ultimate destiny no longer lay in the Gansu, nor even in the ‘Western Regions’ of the Tarim Basin, but much further to the west in Bactria.

Chinese Textual Evidence for the Defeat and Departure of the Yuezhi

The Han sources provide clear and indisputable evidence of the devastating defeat and subsequent departure of the Yuezhi from the Gansu: ‘Sometime later his (Maodun’s) son, the Old *Shanyu*, killed the king of the Yuezhi and made his skull into a drinking cup’;¹¹ that is, ‘the king of the Da Yuezhi had been killed by the nomads’;¹² or ‘killed by the Xiongnu’.¹³ The Yuezhi were forced to retreat, but not without a desire for revenge: ‘The Yuezhi had fled, but, furious as they were with the Xiongnu, there was no party with whom they could attack them jointly’.¹⁴ Or as Sima Qian puts it: ‘as a

Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 23

HS 61.1A

SI 123, Watson p. 231

See SI 330, Watson pp. 145–147, on the 162 treaty

SI 123, Watson p. 234

HS 61.2A

SI 125, Watson p. 232

HS 61.1A

result the Yuezhi had fled and bore a constant grudge against the Xiongnu, though as yet they had been unable to find anyone to join them in an attack on their enemies.¹⁶ With no immediate prospect of redress, the Yuezhi then went far away.¹⁷ Clearly, the defeated Yuezhi, under the heir and successor of their dead king, thought the only option now open to them following this third and most devastating defeat was to relocate. The necessity to migrate, despite still apparently having a substantial force of archer warriors at their disposal,¹⁸ is indicative both of the severity of the 162 defeat, and also of the rampant strength and aggressive expansionist policy pursued by the Xiongnu under Maodun and Jizhu, which had resulted in a half century of declining Yuezhi fortunes. The decision to undertake a substantial journey far to the northwest and resettle in a new region might not have been taken on the spur of the moment, however, given that fifty-year history of ill-treatment at the hands of the Xiongnu, and of gradually eroding prestige and security. The Yuezhi ruling dynasty may have considered such a move previously, particularly during the decade and a half between the 176 BCE attack by the 'Wise King of the Right' and their ultimate defeat at the hands of the Jizhu in 162. But whether one reads the evidence as indicating that the migration, in its first stage at least, seems to have been conducted in a reasonably orderly fashion, suggesting a planned strategic relocation (i.e. they 'went far away'), or rather resembled something of a rout (i.e. the 'Yuezhi had fled') is clearly open to interpretation.

The Yuezhi's initial intention was to move a substantial distance to the northwest and resettle in the valley of the Ili River, a region occupied by a Sakan confederation, an area and people about which the Yuezhi may have had some knowledge. They of course had no intention, nor indeed any idea, that this would only be the first stage of a migration which ultimately would take them deep into Central Asia, a journey of more than 3,500 kilometers, until they found themselves thirty-two years later on the banks of the Amu Darya in northern Bactria.

¹⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 231. With regard to these references, neither Chapter 61 of the *Han Shu* nor Chapter 123 of the *Shi Ji* were in a very good state of preservation, and surprisingly the disorder is exactly the same in both texts. As Hulsewé and Loewe put it, 'it is evident that the text has suffered considerably in many places, because when broken strings were repaired, the original order of the strips was confused. Also, when a single strip had been broken into several pieces, the copyist had been unable to restore the original text. It is highly significant that in all these cases the parallel text of the *Shi Ji* (Chapter 123) provides no help for restoring the original version, for the disorder is exactly the same in both texts' (my italics) (Hulsewé and Loewe (1979) *op. cit.*, p. 15). As was considered in Chapter Two, this can only mean that one text is a copy of the other, and that the original was already in a state of confusion for the copy to be equally confused. Michael Loewe, in a long digression, argues that the *Han Shu* is the original, and the *Shi Ji* the copy (*ibid.* pp. 15-25). More important is Loewe's argument that, although any restoration of the original order of *Han Shu* 61 can only ever be provisional, through the assistance of the *Han Chi* (an epitome or summary of the *Han Shu* published a century or so after the original) plus summaries of the events covered by Chapter 61 included in *Han Shu* 96, the resultant reconstruction of the corrupt text is as close to the original as is possible (*ibid.* pp. 18-19).

¹⁷ HS 96A 15A.

¹⁸ Or at least they did so both during the period of their residency in the Gansu (see HS 96A 15A), and at the end of their migration when they arrived in northern Bactria (see SJ 123, Watson p. 234, and HS 96A 15A) – somewhere between 100–200,000 archer warriors (although the numbers must be considered as approximate).

The Identity of the Successor to the Slain Yuezhi King

The new ruler of the Yuezhi is not named or identified in Zhatag Qian's report, or in either of the principal Han sources, but is generally understood to have been the son of the beheaded king. 'Since the king of the Great Yuezhi had been killed by the Xiongnu, his son (all italics mine) had succeeded him as ruler' (10). Zürcher, in his 1968 translation of the equivalent *Han Shu* passage (61.2A), puts it thus: 'The king of the Great Yuezhi had been killed by the Xiongnu, and they (the Yuezhi) had set up his crown-prince as then king'.¹⁹ However Zürcher admits to some confusion with the rendering of the *Han Shu* passage, and also notes that the *Shi Ji* offers a variant on Watson's translation above. He suggests that the passage might alternatively be translated as: 'and they (the Yuezhi) had set up the crown-prince (born from) his (principal) consort' as king.²⁰ This suggests that the heir was still a male, but perhaps a very young crown-prince, and that the slain king's principal consort (obviously a woman) might also have had a leadership role to play. The identity of the new ruler is then further confused by Zürcher's variant translation of both the *Shi Ji*, 'and they (the Yuezhi) had set up his consort as "king"', and of *Han Shu* 61.2A, 'and they had set up his (principal) consort as their "king"',²¹ both of which suggest that the successor to the dead Yuezhi king was his principal consort, a woman.

Hulsewe and Loewe also offer a translation of the relevant *Han Shu* passage, which reflects the ambiguity and entertains the distinct possibility that the new Yuezhi ruler was a woman. In a footnote to the passage they state that:

The Sung commentator Sung Chi²² . . . remarks that he had seen an ancient copy of the *Han Shu* which read: (his) wife (and) heir apparent . . . (and also that) one of the older commentators of the *Shi Ji*, Hsu Kuang, notes that one version of the SC read *tu jen* (wife), like the *Han Shu*. All texts have *wang* 'king', normally referring to a man, but exceptionally also to a woman . . . Of course it can be argued that the use of *wang* strengthens the argument for reading *taizu*, 'heir-apparent', instead of *tu jen*, 'wife', but we have retained the *lectio difficilior*.²³

While most texts (both older and more recent versions of the Han annals) continue to refer to the new Yuezhi ruler as a man (including the 1739 *Chingwen* edition of the *Han Shu*), the idea that the ruler who led the Yuezhi on their epic migration to Bactria may have been a woman is intriguing. The Hulsewe and Loewe translation of the relevant passage in *Han Shu* 61.2A is:

The king of the Da Yuezhi had been killed by the nomads, and his wife had been established as king (sic) having subjugated Daxia she reigned over it'.²⁴

Nathan finds in this range of variant readings evidence of Chinese 'misinformation'. He offers a possible reconciliation of the textual ambiguity by suggesting that the slain king of the Da Yuezhi was 'survived by his principal consort who was probably

¹⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

²⁰ Zürcher (1968) *op. cit.* p. 359.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 359, n.4.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ An early editor of the *Han Shu*, see M. Loewe, 'Some recent editions of the Ch'ien Han shu', *Asiatic Studies* 23.9 (1963) pp. 165 ff.

²⁴ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.* p. 208, n. 770.

HS 61.2A.

pregnant at the time'.¹⁸ Thus, as the text can be at once interpreted to refer to one or two persons, the pregnant widow would have acted as the *Da* (overseer) and ruled vicariously until the crown prince was old enough to take on his own. Even if the prince had been born before his father was executed by the Xiongnu he would still probably have been only a baby, and thus the regency of the Yuezhi queen-mother need not be doubted.

The Yuezhi Divide

The *Han Shu* and the *Shi Ji* both clearly indicate that not all member tribes of the Yuezhi confederation migrated away from the Gansu with the bulk of their 'people' following the 162 BCE defeat by Jizhu. Indeed the texts provide evidence of a major split within the confederation:

'Then the time came when the *Shan* [and] he filled the king of the Yuezhi, making his skull into a drinking vessel. The Yuezhi that *went far away*. The remaining small group of the Yuezhi who were unable to leave sought protection among the Qiang tribes of the Southern Mountains and were termed the *Xiao Yuezhi*'.¹⁹

'... after they were defeated by the Xiongnu they moved far away to the west. A small number of their people who were unable to make the journey west sought refuge among the Qiang barbarians in the Southern Mountains,²⁰ where they are known as the Lesser Yuezhi'.²¹

These passages show that a major division of the Yuezhi tribes into two unequal groupings (the *Da* or 'Greater', and the *Xiao* or 'Lesser' Yuezhi) took place following their 162 defeat in the Gansu at the hands of the Xiongnu. This split, however, although the most substantial, may have been just another in a long history of such divisions, which is no more than one would expect given that the Yuezhi dynasty ruled over a confederation of tribes of substantially different lifeways, ethnicities and languages. None the less, although there undoubtedly were smaller breakaways following each of the attacks on the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu, the major division of the *Xiao* from the *Da* Yuezhi took place after the 162 defeat.

Not all commentators concur with this conclusion, however. Hulsewé and Loewe, for example, appear to be in agreement with an interpretation of a Memoir on the Qiang in the *Hou Han Shu* by Zhang Zhunzhu. Zhang argued that the substantial split, and the departure of the main Yuezhi body from the Gansu, actually occurred as early as

¹⁸ Naram (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

²⁰ HS 96A 15A. Once again it is occasionally necessary to restate passages of text already quoted earlier in the study, in order to more clearly illustrate a different matter arising from that same passage. The important point here is to show the sequence of events - *after* Jizhu attacked the Yuezhi in 162 the bulk went 'far away', but others sought refuge with the Qiang.

²¹ The Southern Mountains ('Nanshan') are identified with the Qilian and Altun Shan in the southern Gansu in Mallory and Mair (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 59; and more specifically with the 'region of Katanon' by Zurcher *op. cit.*, p. 360.

²² SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

207 BCE when Maodun launched his first raid against the Yuezhi.³⁰ That certain groups who had paid allegiance to the Yuezhi did leave the federation after Maodun's initial attack is highly likely, but this is clearly not the division referred to in the references above, and nor can the departure of the Da Yuezhi from the Gansu possibly be dated to as early as 207. In addition, as noted in the previous chapter, Ying Shih Yu has used the same *Hon Han Shu* Memoir to suggest that the split actually took place following the defeat of the Yuezhi by the 'Wise King of the Right' in 176. Again there probably was a further splintering of those tribes only loosely affiliated with the federation following this event (as the *Hon Han Shu* in a note on the Qiang barbarians seems to imply), but there can be no suggestion that this was the major division noted by the Han chroniclers. That can only have occurred in 162, as the texts clearly indicate.

In particular the *Han Shu* passage quoted above is unequivocal: 'Then the time came when the ... *Shanyu* Laoshang killed (the king) of the Yuezhi, making his skull into a drinking vessel' (that is, then came the 162 defeat of the Yuezhi by Jizhu). 'The Yuezhi thereupon went far away' (the Yuezhi commenced their migration to the north and west). 'The remaining small group (of the Yuezhi) who were unable to leave sought protection among the Qiang tribes of the Southern Mountains and were termed the Xiao Yuezhi' (at which time the Xiao Yuezhi decided to split and sought protection amongst the Qiang).³¹ Narain is also under no doubt that the division occurred at the moment of departure from the Gansu, following the attack by Jizhu, and this is clearly the most probable course of events.³² A further division of the Da Yuezhi would also occur some thirty years later, following an attack upon the resettled Yuezhi in the Ili Basin by the Wusun, as will be shown below.

The Qiang are generally identified with Proto-Tibetan tribes living southwest of the Gansu, mostly in the area of present day Qinghai Province.³³ Pulleyblank argues that the Qiang figured prominently in Han records as 'troublemakers on the northwest frontier', and suggests that they were also foes of the earlier Zhang dynasty.³⁴ As noted earlier, Enoki has hypothesised that the Yuezhi actually ruled a vast area of Inner Asia, including 'the greater part of the Mongolian plain, possibly Zungaria, the north of Tienshan where the Wusun lived, countries in the Tarim Basin and the upper waters of the Yellow River'.³⁵ He believed that the Yuezhi were also 'masters' of the Qiang, and as such the Xiao Yuezhi did not need to 'seek protection' amongst them, but rather simply maintained themselves amongst their Qiang subjects.³⁶

³⁰ Zhang Zhunzhu (1967a), p. 712, note 1, rightly points out that the Xiao or Lesser Yuezhi fled into the hills and sought refuge among the Qiang when the main body of the Yuezhi fled westward as a result of the attack under the Xiongnu ruler Maodun, and not under his successor Laoshang. Hulsewe and Loewe, *op. cit.*, p. 121, n. 286. See Zhang Zhunzhu (Chang Ch'un-shu) in *Tschi-tsu-shih* 46.4 (1974) pp. 145-148. The *Hon Han Shu* reference in question is HHSU Mem. 77.23b.

³¹ Ying Shih Yu (1990, rpt. 1994) *op. cit.*, p. 127.

³² HS 96A 15A.

³³ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

³⁴ See for example W. Eberhard, *Kultur und Siedlung der Ranchvölker Chinas*, Supplement to *Tsinng Pao* (Leiden 1942), pp. 69-87; R. Stein, *Les peuples anciens des marches sino-tibétaines* (Paris 1964) p. 84 ff.; Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 418 ff.; Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

³⁵ Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 418-9.

³⁶ K. Enoki, 'The Yueh-shih-Seythuan Identity, a Hypothesis', *International Symposium on History of Inner and Western Cultural Contacts, Collection of Papers Presented and Compiled by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO* (November 1959) p. 230.

The Chinese sources thus provide clear evidence that on at least four separate occasions the Yuezhi tribal confederation suffered some degree of disintegration. The cause in either 201 or 162 BCE, both, and certainly in 162, they were the Da Yuezhi in 162 and finally in Bactria.⁸⁰ A detailed consideration of the political organisation of Yuezhi political unity will be offered below (both in this and subsequent chapters). They shed considerable light not only on the constitution of the Yuezhi confederation in particular, but also upon nomadic/pastoralist peoples in general. The particular circumstances of the 162 division can only be speculated upon. The Xiao Yuezhi might simply have been 'weaker', less militarised elements of the Yuezhi who fled in the face of the Xiongnu onslaught. Alternatively, given our knowledge of the subsequent tribal yabghu divisions of the Yuezhi in Bactria, perhaps the Xiao Yuezhi was a sixth tribe yabghu which decided against migrating westwards.

A third alternative, which finds some resonance with Enoki's hypothesis, might be that the 'Qiang barbarians' and the Lesser Yuezhi shared a common ethnicity or bond. That is, the Xiao Yuezhi were ethnically Qiang, and were quickly assimilated amongst their fellow Proto-Tibetans on the Qinghai plateau, preferring that to an uncertain future in the west. However it would be wrong to assume that all of the Yuezhi who remained behind joined (and thus were) Qiang, and settled in Qinghai. Later textual references (particularly in the *Hou Han Shi*) note groups of Xiao Yuezhi dwelling in the Fsin Gol, for example, and indeed all of the Yuezhi who stayed behind were probably called Xiao, wherever they ultimately settled. Chapter 20 of the *Shi Ji* - 'The Chronological Table of Marquises Enfeoffed from the *Lanyin* Era' - also notes a number of Yuezhi 'kings' who were enfeoffed by Wu between 108 and 105, as a result of their contribution to 'foreign wars'.⁸¹ The most obvious explanation, which incorporates all of the above circumstances, is that nomadic confederations always contain many different groups, and no matter how tightly coordinated and unified they become under a single ruler or dynasty (in this case the Yuezhi) these ancient but implicit fracture lines are never entirely erased. Hence in a disaster (which the 162 defeat clearly was) the confederation fractured into some of its component parts, and certain tribes/groups returned to what had previously been their homeland.

From the Gansu to the Ili

Leaving their Gansu homeland sometime in 162 BCE, the Da Yuezhi headed northwest from Dunhuang (or Jiayuquan or Minqin, whatever their principal concentration in the Gansu was) towards the valley of the Ili River, which drains into Lake Balkash. Their route (somewhat proscribed by the incidence of deserts and high mountain ranges) might have more or less followed the major Xinjiang highway of today from Anxi through Hami, Turpan and Urumqi, north of the Tien Shan and Borohoro Shan, perhaps approaching and then crossing the border into present-day Kazakhstan just beyond Yining, capital of the Yili (Ili) Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture. However, Laszlo Torday has offered a feasible alternative route west from Dunhuang towards present-day Ruoqiang (i.e. to the north of the Altun Shan), then north to Korla and Lake Bostang (Bosten Hu).⁸² From the lake there were three

⁸⁰ I am grateful to my colleague Jonathan Markley of Macquarie University for his observations on SJ 20 (private correspondence).

⁸¹ Torday *op. cit.*, pp. 234-242; and see map on p. 200.

alternative routes into the heart of the Ili, two of them probably impractical today, Lorday concludes:

...by once the Ta-Yuezhiseth would have opted for a safer route, that is, a route that they could follow on the north and south sides of the Ili River, and then on the south side of the Tien Shan to reach the desert country of the Ili Basin. The distance between Urumqi and Erdos is some 1,000 kilometres (620 miles), a distance which not so large an caravan could traverse in less than 10 days.⁴⁰

For most of the way (along either the direct route or Lorday's more westerly alternative) the initial marches would have traversed arid and inhospitable terrain, relieved only by the occasional oasis settlement. Although the path northwest from Urumqi is less forbidding, the 180-kilometre journey from Urumqi to Urumqi is across a forbidding desert landscape of low shrubs and pebbles in the shadow of 5,445 metre Bogda Feng. West of Urumqi, almost on the border with Kazakhstan, is the more benign Huocheng County, where the pastures around Sayram Hu (Lake Sayram) support the summer yurts of Kazakh and Mongolian herdsmen following (at least for part of the year) their ancient lifeway of pastoral nomadism. The Kazakhs are most probably descended from the Wusun who migrated to, and invaded, the entire Ili Basin region in c. 133-2 BCE, forcing the resettled Yuezhi to resume their migration, as will be shown below.

The region around Yining and Huocheng is (and was) considerably more fertile than the desert roads that have to be traversed from Dunhuang to reach it. The land here is cultivated with fields of purple lavender, wheat, maize, hops, vegetables and sunflowers, and the valley would have been a highly desirable resettlement site for the migrating Yuezhi. It was in this almost sylvan setting that Tielug Timur ('Timur the Lame' – Khan of Moghulistan from 1347 to 1364) chose to be buried: his turquoise, purple and white-tiled tomb is to be found in the village of Masar, near the town of Qingshuihe.

Whether the Yuezhi settled on the Xinjiang side of the present-day China-Kazakhstan border, or further west along that section of the Ili River north of Ysyk-Kul in Kazakhstan (perhaps in the general vicinity, or just to the north of, Almaty) is impossible to know. Wherever they stopped, this journey of up to 1,800 kilometers must have taken some months to complete, although probably less than a year, so that they probably arrived in the region sometime later in the same year of their departure from the Gansu, that is 162. Estimating the time it would take for a substantial horde to cover these distances is clearly difficult, but Michael Loewe has used Han administration figures to calculate that 'it probably took nine days to convey routine mail along a distance of some 160 kilometres',⁴¹ a rate of about 18 kilometres per day. Thus, even for a fast moving mail deliverer it would have taken 100 days to cover 1800 kilometres or so from Minqin to Almaty. For a huge confederation of tribes uprooted from their semi-sedentary homeland the journey might have taken substantially longer, although again this would partly have depended upon whether their journey was an orderly retreat, or a desperate flight from a pursuing Xiongnu horde (perhaps with the assistance of their Wusun allies).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 240.

⁴¹ M. Loewe, *Records of Han Administration* vol. 1 (Cambridge 1967) p. 43.

Incidental evidence of this may rather point to the fact that the Yuezhi, like the Sakas, were nomadic. A group called the *Tarim Basin Yuezhi* is mentioned in Chinese sources discussed extensively in Chapter One, and Hermann (1991, 1994) has argued that the first named in 1914 that the nomadic group was the *Tarim Basin Yuezhi* (who did live more probably on the present-day territory of the *Yuezhi* in the *Alexandrov Range* (present-day *Kazakhstan*) and the *Yuezhi* (who lived in the *Yuezhi* who remained in the *Il* region after the migration) was a *Wusun*.⁴² It is this identification which has led to a general conclusion that the *Tarim Basin Yuezhi* probably settled in the Upper *Il* Basin, nearer to *Namang* rather than the lower sections within *Namang*. But Hermann's argument that the *Tarim Basin Yuezhi* are likely to have been remnants of the main *Yuezhi* horde that retreated to the region and assimilated with the *Wusun* following their attack in 1512 (as mentioned above) provides little assistance in the identification of the original settlement of the *Da Yuezhi* following their migration from the *Gansu*. There is also tentative archaeological evidence of the *Yuezhi* occupation of the region to be considered, which will be discussed separately towards the end of this chapter.

The *Il* Valley was by no means unoccupied territory, however. The Chinese sources make it clear that a substantial group of *Sakas* was already in residence, and as a result of the confrontation with the migrating *Yuezhi* that followed, most of the *Sakas* were expelled. They were consequently forced to undertake their own very impressive migration, which would in turn have a significant impact upon the history of the western *Tarim Basin* and *Kashmir* in particular, far to the south beyond the *Karakoram*. Although outside of the principal focus of this book, the next section of this chapter attempts to offer an analysis of the most likely route of the uprooted *Sakas*, both to illustrate the particular point of the immediate impact of the *Yuezhi* migration upon the region, and the more general of the fundamental importance of the domino-effect in Inner Eurasian history.

II

The Expulsion and Migration of the Sakas from the Il Valley

The Identity of the Il Basin Sakas

The Chinese sources state that the region into which the *Yuezhi* moved at the end of the initial stage of their migration was already populated by the 'Sai' (or *Saka*) people. The *Sakas* are generally assumed to be pastoral nomads who spoke an Indo-

⁴² *Idol*, vi, 14, 7-14.

⁴³ A. Hermann, 'Sakas' col. 1770-1806', in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 2e Reihe, Vol. I (Stuttgart 1914).

⁴⁴ As noted in Chapter One, *Tam* (1938, reprint 1951) *op. cit.*, pp. 515 provides a detailed discussion of Greek names for the *Tocharians*, *Yuezhi*.

In Darius' time both the *Tigravandaka* and the *Hammavandava* were described (rather vaguely) as living *para Suvakam* ('beyond Sogd' or 'southern Sogdiana'), i.e. migrating from the Syr Darya south towards Sogdian northern Bactria and a little east of the Ferghana Valley. Ptolemy located the seat of the *Saragastae* (presumably the *Tigravandaka*) as being 'south of the Syr Darya'.⁵⁷ These *Saragastae* were well known to the Greeks, having furnished horsemen wearing mailed armor to the army of Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela,⁵⁸ and later supplying Alexander with cavalry to assist in his invasion of India.⁵⁹ As will be shown in Chapter Five, by the time the Yuezhi passed through Sogdia in c. 131 the *Tigravandaka* Sakas were probably in occupation of northern Bactria, and may have undermined the last substantial vestiges of Greek power in Bactria proper and established hegemony over it. The Yuezhi defeated the northern Bactrian Sakas in c. 130, and in so doing gained *de facto* suzerainty over Bactria.

The evidence indicates, then, that there were at least three different groups of Sakas dwelling along the Yuezhi's migration route, and it is important to clearly differentiate between the Sakas of the Ili Basin, the Amyrrians of Ferghana and the *Tigravandaka* south of the Syr Darya and north of the Amu Darya. Pulleyblank has even argued for a possible cultural affiliation between the easternmost Sakas (of the Ili Valley) with the Xiongnu, although how much of this cultural similarity (as revealed in unearthed archaeological artefacts) is due to the commonality of lifeway pursued by both groups, and how much to a more specific ethnic and religious affiliation, is debatable.⁶⁰ The Chinese sources also provide compelling evidence for the separate identification of the various Saka groups disrupted and evicted by the migrating Yuezhi.

Chinese Textual Evidence for the Expulsion of the Ili Basin Sakas

The *Han Shu* in particular provides a clear chronology and sequence of events:

'At the time the Yuezhi had already been defeated by the Xiongnu, making their way to the west they attacked the king of the Sai. The king of the Sai moved a considerable distance to the south and the Yuezhi then occupied his lands.'⁶¹

'When the Da Yuezhi turned west, defeated and expelled the king of the Sai, the latter moved south and crossed over the Suspended Crossing, and the Da Yuezhi took up residence in his lands.'⁶²

Both passages describe that part of the migration *before* the Wusun attacked the Yuezhi and forced them to continue their journey further west (events described below), because each goes on to recount the attack of the Wusun some time *after* the eviction of the Sakas. There can be no doubt whatsoever, then, about the identity and geographical location of this particular group of Sakas, nor any reason to confuse them with other groups of Sakas whom the Yuezhi would also displace later in their

⁵⁷ Ptol., vi, 14, 14.

⁵⁸ Arrian, *Anabasis*, iii, 8, 3; 11, 4; 13, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* v, 12, 2.

⁶⁰ Pulleyblank (1962) *op. cit.*, pp. 58-144, 206-265; Pulleyblank (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 451. See also N. Egami, *Yoroshima kodai hoppo bunka* (Tokyo, 1948).

⁶¹ HS 61.4B.

⁶² HS 96B.1B.

migration, as has sometimes been the case in the past. The textual evidence in *Han Shu* the Yuezhi, in moving into the Ili Valley, were forced to defeat and expel the king (wang) of the resident Sai-Sakas. Given the formidable weaponry of the Sakas Scythians dwelling further west (as listed by Herodotus above) including bows, daggers and battle-axes, the apparent ease with which the Yuezhi defeated and expelled the Ili Sakas is evidence of the Yuezhi's continuing strength, despite their very recent defeat by the Xiongnu. The Sakan king then led his people a 'considerable distance' to the south, and crossed over the 'Suspended Crossing'.

However, the identity of the various Saka groups with whom the Yuezhi interacted during their migration is further complicated by a rather inexact third *Han Shu* reference, this time from 96A, which confuses the Ili Valley Sakas with the Sakas who were dwelling in southern Sogdia when the Yuezhi eventually arrived there some three decades later:

'When, formerly, the Xiongnu conquered the Da Yuezhi, the latter moved west and established themselves as master of Daxia; it was in these circumstances that the king of the Sai moved south and established himself as master of Chipin. The Sai tribes split and separated and repeatedly formed several states. To the northwest of Shule states such as Xiuxun and Juandu are all of the former Sai race.'⁶³

Despite the implication that it was the Bactrian (Daxian) Sakas who conquered Chipin (Kashmir), the specific chronological sequence outlined in the first two passages must outweigh the ambiguity of the third. It was surely the king of the Ili Valley Sakas (or possibly the Amyrgians of the Ferghana Valley, or even both) who led his people south, crossed the Suspended Crossing, and as the third passage indicates, conquered Kashmir and established himself as master there. Narain agrees:

'When the Yuezhi reached the Upper Ili they displaced the Sai (Saka) people: some of the Sai princes (*Sai-wang*) moved south and ultimately reached Chipin. The Yuezhi, on the other hand, were soon attacked by the Wusun, and hence they moved west beyond Dayuan to occupy Daxia. It is important to note that the Chinese evidence is consistent and explicit in saying that the Sai moved to the south and the Yuezhi to the west; the two peoples did not travel in the same direction'.⁶⁴

Narain is premature in suggesting that the Wusun 'soon' attacked the Yuezhi; this event actually took place almost three decades later. But his differentiation of the Ili Valley Sakas from other Sai/Sakan groups along the Yuezhi's more westerly migrational route is strongly supported by the textual evidence: 'The Sai of the Upper Ili, mentioned in Chinese sources, were another Scythian tribe; they should not be confused with the Scythians of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) valley or other areas west of them'.⁶⁵ Most (although not all) of this first group of Yuezhi-displaced Sakas were thus forced to undertake their own lengthy migration, moving west and south around the western edge of the Taklamakan, before crossing 'over the Suspended Crossing' and settling in Kashmir. Not all of the Ili Basin Sakas fled, however, and both textual and archaeological evidence suggests a degree of assimilation into the broader Yuezhi (and later Wusun) confederacies of the Ili, as will be considered below.

The Probable Route of the Saka Migration

For a group occupying the Ili Basin there were few route options available in the event of a forced and sudden eviction, particularly as the Han sources clearly state that the Sakas moved south. One southerly alternative was to move back along the same track that the Yuezhi has just followed, at least as far as Urumqi. From there a branch 'road' through Korla would make it possible to link up with either the northern or southern Tarim Basin routes, allowing eventual access to the 'Hanging Pass' and Kashmir. However, given that the invading Yuezhi had probably attacked along that route, it is more probable that the Sakas would have fled in the opposite direction. It is also more than likely that both the Xiongnu 'Wise King of the Right' and the Wusun remained in occupation in the Gansu and eastern Xinjiang regions following their defeat of the Yuezhi, making that area less attractive to migrants.⁶⁶

An alternative was to move initially west (ahead of the invading Yuezhi) through the region of present-day Almaty and Bishkek, and then south over the Turgart Shankou, entering the western Tarim Basin from the north.⁶⁷ This is a more likely alternative, and once over the pass it would have given the Sakas access to the major oasis states of the western Tarim, states that either were already, or would become following the arrival of the migrants, occupied by Indo-Iranian-speaking peoples.⁶⁸ Philologists are in no doubt that the language of Khotan, for example (and also Kashgar and several other 'states' of the far western Tarim) clearly belonged 'to the Sakan group of Eastern Iranian languages',⁶⁹ but whether those languages were already in place in the western Tarim by c. 160 BCE, or whether they were carried there by the migrating Sakas in the decades following, is a moot point. Given that the latter scenario is at least a possibility, then the Chinese texts, through their descriptions of various states of the 'Western Regions' and beyond, might also provide indirect evidence of the probable itinerary of the migrating Ili Basin Sakas, and of the consequent diffusion of Indo-Iranian languages into the Tarim Basin.

The Sakas apparently split into various groups during their lengthy migration (of probably several decades' duration), many choosing to settle in different oasis-based locations along the way rather than continue the journey to Kashmir. As noted above, Ban Gu states that 'the Sai tribes split and separated and repeatedly formed several states'.⁷⁰ These incidental references provide potential evidence that might allow scholars to trace the migratory movement of the expelled Sakas southwards through the western Tarim Basin, and are found in descriptions of those 'several states' mainly in the *Han Shu*. Frye also argues that the key to an understanding of the probable route of this particular group of migrating Sakas is both through the evidence of the spread of Khotanese-Sakan, and Chinese textual references to Sai occupation of certain states of the western Tarim Basin.⁷¹ Amongst those 'states' and settlements visited and perhaps occupied by various groups of migrating Sakas are the following:

⁶⁶ For a more precise identification of the probable headquarters of the Wise King of the Right, see Chapter Four.

⁶⁷ This would have been a serious undertaking, as the Turgart Pass is some 3752 metres high.

⁶⁸ Torday also offers a detailed description of the first part of the itinerary proposed in this study, in *Torday op. cit.*, pp. 253 ff.

⁶⁹ Mallory and Mallory *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁷⁰ HS 96A 1083.

⁷¹ Frye (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 125.

Xiuxun

(Irkeshtam, on the border between Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan)

Location: 'It is west of the Couplun (Pamir), and is distant by 10,210 *li* (6400 kms) from Chang'an. . . to the east it is a distance of 3121 *li* to the Seat of the Protector General, and 269 *li* to Yandun valley; on the state of Changan, to the northwest it is a distance of 920 *li* (368 kms) to the state of Dayuan, and 1610 *li* (645 kms) to the west, to the Da Yuezhi'.⁷²

Xiuxun was thus located above the northwestern corner of the Tarim Basin, just to the east of the Pamirs, right on the present-day border between Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan. To the northwest is Ferghana, to the southeast Kashgar, and to the west Bactria (beyond the Pamirs). If the migrating Hsi Basin Sakas moved south over the Turugart Shankou they would have by-passed Irkeshtam, but if they or other groups of Sakas displaced in the later stages of the Yuezhi migration (from the Ferghana Valley for example) came through the region of Osh (as any Sakas heading south from the Ferghana Valley would surely do) they would have passed directly through Irkeshtam.

Population Size: Households 358 Individuals: 1030.⁷³

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms 480.⁷⁴

Lifeway: 'The popular way of life and clothing are of the same type as Wusun, and in company with their stock animals they go after water and pasture. Originally they were of the Sai race'.⁷⁵

This description in the *Han Shu* (and those that follow) is from the 'Account of the Western Regions', and thus dates anytime from the establishment of the Office of the Protector General of the Western Regions (59 BCE) to as late as 75 CE, when Ban Chao probably provided information used by Ban Gu to update the *Han Shu*. That is, the *Han Shu* account is describing the situation at least a century, and perhaps up to two centuries, after the commencement of the Saka migration. By that time Xiuxun would seem to have become the semi-permanent encampment of a group of Saka nomads located high on the route to the Terek Dawan Pass, along the important road from Kashgar across the Pamirs to Ferghana, Bactria and all points west. Were the original Saka occupants of Xiuxun part of the main body of Sakas displaced by the Yuezhi, who had decided to remain in the Irkeshtam area? Or had they been dwelling in the region much longer, as another example of the great extent and variety of the Scythian Indo-Iranian occupation of Inner Asia during the Late Bronze Age? By the time the report was being compiled the inhabitants were described as being 'originally' of the Sai race, which would not be at all surprising given the amount of time that would have elapsed even since a c. 1600 arrival by the migrating Sakas. An additional reference to Xiuxun confirms its identification as a Sai Sakan settlement (see below).⁷⁶

Given that Nuixian occupied such a strategic site, many travellers (including merchants and Han envoys) would have sought shelter there. The *Kou Han* also probably used the Terek Dawan to gain access to Kashgar and Khotan in the mid-first century CE, and Viceroy Hsieh would no doubt have led his force of 70,000 Kushan archer-warriors through Nuixian and down into the Tarim in his abortive attempt to confront Ban Chao and his Han forces in 90 CE. As Hulsewe and Loewe note, several western authors (Stein, Hermann, Innes) have located the famous 'Stone Tower' mentioned by merchant traveller Maes Titianus (Ptolemy's informant) in the Irkeshtam area.⁷⁶ The Italian explorer and geographer Filippo de Filippi was one of the first modern Europeans to pass through Irkeshtam and across the Terek Dawan in 1914. He described the road from Kashgar ascending the course of the Kashgar River to the small Russian border outpost at Irkeshtam (8530 feet above sea level), before ascending again through the great Terek Dawan depression to the top of the pass at 13,500 feet. Although by no means an easy crossing, it is one of few feasible passes of the region, the depression being formed where the Tian Shan meets the Pamirs.⁷⁷

Shule (Kashgar)

Location: '... it is distant by 9,350 *li* (3740 kms) from Chang'an ... to the east it is a distance of 2210 *li* to the Seat of the Protector General, and to the south a distance of 560 *li* to Suifu. To the west it is situated on the route to the Da Yuezhi, Dayuan and Kangju'.⁷⁸

Shule was clearly a major military, administrative and mercantile centre at the western end of the 'Western Regions'. In Shule Kashgar both the northern and southern Tarim Basin routes met, and the routes to the west then climbed up either through the Terek Dawan and Irkeshtam, or across the Turugart Shankou towards Ysyk Kul.

Population/Size: Households: 1510. Individuals: 18,647.⁷⁹

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms: 2000,⁸⁰ led by the 'masters of the cavalry of the left and right', i.e. the military forces of Kashgar were mainly equestrian, and were divided into two divisions.⁸¹

The *Han Shu* describes the administrative framework in place in Kashgar sometime between the middle of the last century BCE and the last quarter of the first century CE to govern this important crossroads city-state, with its substantial population of almost 19,000 people. Apart from the senior noble, bureaucratic leaders of the left and right and the interpreters-in-chief, government was principally in the hands of the military. There were officers charged specifically with leading assaults upon the nomads (Xiongnu), a commandant, and the cavalry masters. During the early and middle decades of the first century CE, the Yuezhi/Kushans would come to exert considerable influence upon Kashgar, and soon after 75 CE it would become the

⁷⁶ Hulsewe and Loewe, p. 138, n. 355.

⁷⁷ Filippo de Filippi, *The Italian Expedition to the Himalayas, Karakoram and Eastern Turkestan (1913-14)* (London 1932) pp. 496-7.

⁷⁸ HS 96A 201B.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

headquarters of Protector General Ban Chao for his operations against the Xiongnu and rebellious states of the western Tarim. It was probably also from Kashgar that Ban Chao conducted his successful defence of the city state against a strong Kushan force in 90 CE, as described above. Yet as late as the first quarter of the second century CE, the Kushans would still be playing a substantial role in the internal politics and royal succession of Kashgar.⁸²

There is little evidence that the passage of the migrating Sakas left any notable influence upon Kashgar, but that is hardly surprising given the size and cosmopolitan make-up of the city. Yet pre-Islamic Kashgar has definitely been assigned to the Indo-Iranian-language sphere. Philological evidence suggests that the Sakan dialects of the Tarim Basin probably originated in, and were initially confined to, the western end of the Tarim (at least in documentary form), only gradually diffusing eastwards after they had been long established in Kashgar and similar western centres.

Wulei

(Near Yarkand)

Location: 9950 ft (3080 kms) from Chang'an (Xi'an); 2465 ft southwest of the Seat of the Protector General; 540 ft north of Puli (near Yarkand). It adjoins Wucha (or Wuma) in the south (a settlement probably to the south of Yarkand, or perhaps near Tashkurgan, according to Chavannes),⁸³ and the Yuezhi in the west.⁸⁵

Wulei was obviously another state at the western end of the Tarim Basin, located to the east of the Pamirs somewhere close to Yarkand, or perhaps between Yarkand and Tashkurgan. To the southwest, across the Wakhjir Pass, the Yuezhi yabghu of Xuimi may later have been located (possibly in the Vakhn Corridor). Further south again the route would have crossed the Mingteke or Khunjerab Passes (or similar), more or less following the Karakoram Highway of today, leading to the states of Nandou (the Gilgit Valley) and Chipin (Kashmir).

Population Size: Households: 1000 Individuals: 7000.

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms: 3000.⁸⁶

Lifeway: 'Clothing is of the same type as that of Wusun, and the way of life is similar to that of Zhihe (near the Ili Basin).'⁸⁷

This relatively substantial state in the far western corner of the Tarim is included here not only because its residents apparently followed a lifeway similar to that of far-off Tzulo (which Chavannes located near Karghalik between the Ili and Ierek Rivers)⁸⁸

⁸² See HHS 118, 13b, for example.

⁸³ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁸⁴ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁸⁵ HHS 96A 10A.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ See E. Chavannes, 'Les deux plus anciens spécimens de la cartographie chinoise', *L'Extrême Orient* 3 (1903) p. 397; E. Chavannes, 'Les pays d'Occident', in *Tsing Pao* 8 (1907) p. 175.

but also because of references in two later Chinese sources which reinforce its strategic location. The geographically-broad suggestion of a continuity of life-way with former residents of the Ili region, and the fact that the migrating Sakas would have to have passed through Wulei to continue south, makes it a possibly important stop on their migrational route, and suggests that some of its residents at least were probably of Sakan origin.

The *Hou Han Shu* states that by going west and passing through Puli and Wulei one arrives among the Yuezhi, and the *Shui ching chu* quotes the *Shih shih yün chü* as stating: 'This country (Wulei) is narrow and small, but it controls the important roads of all the states, which all pass through it'.⁸⁹ The obvious strategic importance of Wulei strengthens claims for identifying it with Yarkand (present day Shache). Ancient Yarkand was located on the southern Tarim Basin route between Khotan and Kashgar, and was well placed to exert control over traffic upon that route. Alternatively, if Wulei is to be located closer to Tashkurgan, then it would have been equally conveniently placed to control traffic on the strategic route that lead from Kashgar to the Wakhjir, Mingteke and Khunjerab Passes. Either way, the fact that the state was 'narrow and small' suggests that the route lay directly through narrow and defensible terrain. Kushan forces under Kujula Kadphises might also have passed through Wulei en route either to Khotan (where the Kushans would also exert considerable influence – see below), or south towards Nandou and Chipin, states that would number amongst Kujula's earliest conquests.

Yutian (Near Khotan)

Location: '... it is distant by 9670 *li* (3868 kms) from Changan... To the northeast it is a distance of 3947 *li* to the Seat of the Protector General. To the west there is communication with Pishan (west of Khotan and southwest of Yarkand) at a distance of 380 *li*'.⁹⁰

Yutian must have been located close to present-day Khotan (Hotan) on the southern Tarim Basin route. To the south are the Kunlun Shan (Qurun Mountains), and to the north and east the Taklamakan. Two smaller states are noted on either side of Yutian (Chulo and Pishan), but Yutian with its substantial population of 19,000 plus must clearly be identified with the site of ancient Khotan.

Population/Size:	Households:	3300	Individuals:	19,300. ⁹¹
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Military Strength:	Persons able to bear arms:	2400. Amongst its officials were the 'masters of the cavalry of the left and right'. ⁹²
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Khotan was favourably located between the only two rivers that carry meltwater north from the Qurum Mountains into the Taklamakan. The fertility of the loess soils of the Khotan oasis made it a wealthy agricultural centre, and also an important centre for silk production during the classical era of the 'Silk Roads' exchanges. In addition, as

⁸⁹ *HS* Mem. 78.19a, *Shui ching chu* 1.71b ff. See Hulsewé and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 102, n. 187.

⁹⁰ *HS* 96A.8A.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

was pointed out in Chapter One, Khotan (along with Yarkand) was one of the only known sources of jade for the Zhou and other early Chinese dynasties, and that precious substance was possibly traded with the Chinese by the ancestors of the Yue du dynasty. During the first century CE Khotan also featured prominently in the conflict between the Han and Xiongnu that played out in the Western Regions. But it is linguistic evidence that more specifically links ancient Yutian with the Sakas.

In fact the best-attested Iranian language of east Central Asia is Khotanese Sakan, so named because most of the manuscripts in this dialect come from Khotan. The subsequent trajectory of Sakan languages in the region was from west to east, which means that the only way in which the language could have been introduced into the far western Tarim was from the north (or less probably the south), before subsequently spreading eastwards as far as Dunhuang. And the only route by which Sakas could have entered the western Tarim was by one of the two passes described above. The incidence and early date of Khotanese Sakan might thus be interpreted as further evidence of the passage through (and settlement in) the region by the 'easternmost' Sakas, displaced from the Ili Basin (and/or the Ferghana Valley) by the migrating Yuezhi.⁹¹ As a post-script to this Cribb has argued that the evidence of the Sino-Kharosthi coins of Khotan indicates that more than two centuries later the descendants of the Yuezhi, the Kushans under Kujula Kadphises, came to exert considerable influence (economic, political and military) upon the (presumably Indo-Iranian-speaking) Khotanese King Xiunbe in the decade c. 55–65 CE.⁹²

Wucha (or Wuna)
(Possibly Tashkurgan)

Location: "... it is distant by 9950 *li* (3980 kms) from Changan ... To the northeast it is a distance of 4892 *li* to the Seat of the Protector (General ... It adjoins Zhe (Kargalik, south of Yarkand?) and Puli (also near Yarkand) in the north, and Nandou (lower Gult River) in the west (southwest?). To the west (138 *li* 55 kms to the southwest?) there is the Suspended Crossing ..."⁹³

Wucha was a small state located at the far western end of the Western Regions, and is most probably to be identified with present-day Tashkurgan, with Kargalik and Yarkand to the north. Southwest of Wucha, beyond the Karakoram Range, were the states of Nandou and Kashmir (see below). West or southwest of Wucha was the 'Suspended Crossing', a pass which must have led either west through the Pamirs, or more probably southwest through the Karakoram.

Population/Size: Households: 490 Individuals: 2733.⁹⁴

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms: 740.⁹⁵

⁹¹ See Mallory and Mair, *op. cit.*, pp. 254–5 for a neat summary of the evidence for Khotanese Sakan.

⁹² See Cribb, 'The Sino-Kharosthi Coins of Khotan, their attribution and relevance to Kushan chronology', *Numismatica Chronicle* 7th Series, Part 1: 144 (1984) pp. 128 ff, Part 2: 145 (1985) pp. 36 ff.

⁹³ HS 96A 8B 9A

⁹⁴ HS 96A 8B

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Highways

‘The inhabitants live in the mountain and a rocky path runs between the rocks. There is a chain of stones on the path, one on another to make a walking. The people join their hands together. The land produces the wheat, barley, and there are asses but no cattle.’⁹⁷

This is clearly a description of a small mountain settlement located high up in the eastern foothills of the Pamirs. The inhabitants live in stone huts and eked out a no-doubt precarious agricultural existence on terraces built up by stone walls upon the steep hillsides. The reference to ‘joining hands together’ to drink might suggest the necessity of linking arms in a human chain to even reach a water supply in the steep rocky gorges of the region.

The Location of the Suspended Crossing/Hanging Pass

The significance of Wucha to both Yuezhi-Kushan and Sakan history is its location close to (and therefore possibly having some control over) the ‘Suspended Crossing’, described by Ban Gu thus: ‘What is termed the ‘Suspended Crossing’ is a rocky mountain; the valley is impenetrable, and people traverse the place by pulling each other across with ropes’.⁹⁸ Pulleyblank quotes a eulogistic decree of the year 95 CE which implies that Ban Chao, while stationed in Yunnan Khotan, probably campaigned as far as the Suspended Crossing (which also translates as the ‘Hanging Pass’): ‘Chao therefore crossed the Onion Range and went as far as the Hanging Pass’.⁹⁹ Pulleyblank uses this passage as further evidence that it was probably Ban Chao’s 75 CE report that provided the information used to update the ‘Memoir on the Western Regions’ in the *Han Shu*.¹⁰⁰ Later in the *Han Shu*, Han envoy Tuzhin describes the negotiation of the Suspended Crossing:

‘In the present case the bar formed by the Suspended Crossing is such that it cannot be traversed by (the inhabitants) of Chimu. (There is) a path that is (40 cm) wide, but leads forward for a length of thirty *li*, overlooking a precipice whose depth is unfathomed. Travellers passing on horse or foot hold on to one another and pull each other along with ropes. When animals fall, before they have dropped half-way down the chasm they are shattered in pieces, and when men fall, the situation is such that they are unable to rescue one another. The danger of these precipices beggars description’.¹⁰¹

One possible candidate for this high mountain pass apparently crossed by the migrating Sakas could be the Wakhjir Pass, which leads due west from the present-day Karakoram Highway into the Vakhjan Corridor of Afghanistan. But given that the Vakhjan might later have been a home for the Yuezhi yabghu of the Xuimi, this

⁹⁷ HS 96A 8B-9A.

⁹⁸ HS 96A 9A.

⁹⁹ Xunru Liu claims that it was Tang Dynasty historian, Du You, who argued that the Chinese transliteration of the ‘Indus’ was *Yuanlu*, which he interpreted by the literal meaning of the two characters, ‘Hanging Cross’, meaning that one has to hang a rope to cross over the river. See Xunru Liu, ‘Trade and Pilgrimage Routes from Afghanistan to Taxila, Mathura and the Ganges Plains’, in *Journal of Indo-Iranica* vol. 1 (Hindustan Turk Tarikh Arashumalari, 2001) pp. 113 ff. See also M. Teycan, ‘Kuzey Hindistan Geçitleri’ (North Indian Mountain Passes), in *Journal of Indo-Iranica* *ibid.*, pp. 141 ff (in Turkish with an English summary).

¹⁰⁰ Pulleyblank (1968) *op. cit.*, p. 251.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² HS 96A 12A-13.

updated account in the *Han Shu* would probably have mentioned the Yuezhi as neighbours of Wucha (or of Wucha being on the road to the Yuezhi as noted in the case of Wuyue for example). Furthermore, given that Wucha is described as lying on the route of Xindao (the Gilgit Valley) and then Chipin (Kashmir), which the *Han Shu* states specifically was conquered by the Sakas (see below), the Suspended Crossing/Hanging Pass should more probably be identified with an ancient pass in the present-day vicinity of the Khimete or Mingteke Passes, leading southwest from the present Karakoram Highway into the Gilgit Valley. Certainly Chavannes preferred this interpretation when he argued that the Suspended Crossing led from the Pamirs into the Gilgit Valley.¹⁰¹ Various attempts have been made (for almost a century now) to identify the Crossing, mostly through the interpretation of texts and historical references. More recently, field expeditions to the region have attempted to locate likely routes through geo-archaeological research. Tsuchiya published a 'preliminary report' on Japanese field research carried out in northern Pakistan between 1991 and 1996, which also nominated either the Mingteke or Wakhjir Passes as likely candidates.¹⁰²

Narain also argued that the Sakas must have exited the southwestern corner of the Ili Basin by one of the Karakoram passes, although he preferred to locate the Suspended Crossing/Hanging Pass itself further south, beyond Kashmir: 'we suggest that they took the direct route to Tashkurgan (*Wucha* above), from which they proceeded via one of the northern passes to Gilgit'.¹⁰³ Yet the unambiguous textual statement that the Ili Basin Sakas proceeded into Kashmir via the Hanging Pass has been questioned by scholars in the past, solely on the idea that any such crossing would have been impassable.¹⁰⁴ In response, Narain provides two examples of 'instances when Chipin and the northern and western regions of Kashmir were attacked from the north', and also notes that this became 'the general trade route in the later historical periods'.¹⁰⁵

One does not need to search very far forward in history at all to find evidence of another probable successful negotiation of the Hanging Pass, for it is quite likely that the Kushans under Kujula Kadphises also made the arduous crossing. As Joe Cribb has noted, Kujula's bull and camel coinage, issued in imitation of the Indo-Scythian ruler of Kashmir, Zosimus (a descendant of the Ili Basin Sakan migrants to Kashmir), survives in many varieties and was produced over a longer period of time than his subsequent Taxila issues. This suggests Kujula probably captured Kashmir (and thus the Gilgit Valley) from the north, by coming over a pass into the Upper Indus to outflank the Indo-Parthian rulers of Kabul, before going on to take Taxila.

¹⁰¹ E. Chavannes, 'Trois généraux chinois de la dynastie des Han orientaux' in *T'oung Pao* 7 (1906) p. 287, n. 4. See Hulsewé and Loewe *op. cit.* p. 99, n. 169 for a discussion of various attempts to identify the Suspended Crossing/Hanging Pass.

¹⁰² R. Tsuchiya, 'Tracing Ancient Routes in Northern Pakistan', Preliminary Report of Field Research (1991-1996), in M. Abram, D. E. Klimburg-Salter, eds., *Coin, Art and Chronology* (Vienna 1999) pp. 353-5.

¹⁰³ Narain (1957) *op. cit.* p. 135. See also A. Stein, *Ancient Khotan* (Oxford 1907) pp. 1-46.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Thomas (1913) *op. cit.* pp. 634 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Narain (1957) *op. cit.* p. 137. See also A. Stein, *On Central Asian Tracks* (London 1933) p. 42, where Stein suggests that Kao Xien Zhi may have led an army of 10,000 across very high passes in 747 C.E. in an invasion of Gilgit, and Xinru Liu (2001) *op. cit.*

and Gandhara.¹⁰⁹ If Crabb is correct and even if the Yuezhi had been able to establish a base in Khotan, Kupula must have led his army of archers across an almost 8000-metre-high Suspended Crossing (Hanging Pass). Given the situation above (and even allowing for Han exaggeration) this was no mean cultural feat, at least the equal of Hannibal's achievement in bringing his forces over the lower, lower and less precipitous pass near Monte Viso in the French-Italian Alps. But it turns out, Kupula was perhaps merely following in the footsteps of the migrating Sakas from the Hsi who had crossed the same pass some two centuries earlier.

Nandou

(On the lower course of the Gilgit River)

Location: ... it is distant by 10,150 *li* (4060 kms) from Chang'an. ... In the northeast it is a distance of 2850 *li* to the Seat of the Protection General. ... (to the west (northwest) it is a distance of 340 *li* to Wulei (Yarkand) and to the south-west, 330 *li* (130 kms) to Chipin (Jibin, Kashmir). ... It adjoins ... the Da Yuezhi in the west.¹¹⁰

Nandou was a small but quite populous state probably located on the lower reaches of the Gilgit River in Pakistan's present-day Northern Areas Province, south of Tashkurgan, the Karakoram and beyond the Suspended Crossing Northwest of Nandou - by the time the report was compiled - the Yuezhi yabghu of Xumi in the Wakhan may have been located, and due west possibly another yabghu of the Zhuangmi in the area around Chitral.

Population/Size: Households, 5000 Individuals, 31,000

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms, 8000.¹¹¹

(the inhabitants) make weapons in the same way as the various other states ... It is subject to Chipin (Jibin).¹¹²

Lifeways: (The inhabitants) grow the five field crops, grapes and various fruits. There is silver, copper and iron.¹¹³

This description clearly dates to the 'five yabghu period', in that the inhabitants of Nandou were apparently near-neighbours of two Yuezhi yabghu. Nandou was located to the (north)west of Chipin (Kashmir), and was subject to that state. As argued above, this information must date from somewhere between c. 50 BCE and 75 CE, for much of which Kashmir was under the control of the Sakas (or Indo-Scythians as they became known), quite possibly the descendants of the Hsi-Basin Sakan migrants. But towards the end of that period the geo-political situation in the region changed dramatically, and if the information was indeed provided in c. 75 CE by Ban Chao, he was apparently unaware of recent (or perhaps imminent) events.

¹⁰⁹ Joe Crabb, 'The Early Kushan Kings: New Evidence for Chronology', Evidence from the Rabatak Inscription of Kanishka I, in M. Alam and D. Klimburg-Salter, eds., *Gandhara: Archaeology, Essays on the Pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Gangetic Borderlands* (Vienna 1999) pp. 177-205.

¹¹⁰ HS 96A.10A.10B

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

In 145, Sei CF, the first Kushan king, Kaniska Kadphises, united the *Da Yuezhi* yabghu, possibly in response to the invasion of formerly-held Yuezhi territory, the Kabul Valley, by the Indo-Parthian Gondophares. As suggested above, and in subsequent campaigns to defeat Gondophares for his successor and nephew, Andagases, Kaniska probably led Yuezhi-Kushan forces over a high Karakoram pass, into the Upper Indus, conquering Nandou and Kashmir before outflanking the Indo-Parthians and recapturing Khotan-Kabul. For any force arriving from the north and intent upon invading Kashmir, the 'state' of Nandou would first have to be conquered, as indeed the Sakas must have done, apparently maintaining their hegemony over Nandou after they established themselves in Kashmir. Which also means that this Gilgit River state must be recognised as possibly the first 'foreign' state to be conquered and incorporated into the embryonic Kushan Empire. Although a small state, Nandou manufactured iron weapons, and the apparent ease and speed with which the migrating Sakas, and later the Kushans, conquered Nandou and Chipin is indicative of the strength of both the Sakas under their king, and the Kushan forces under Kaniska, even after their serious crossings of the Karakoram.¹¹⁴

Chipin (Jibin) (Kashmir)

Location: ... it is distant by 12,200 *li* (4880 kms) from Changan. To the northeast it is a distance of 6840 *li* to the Seat of the Protector General. To the east (northeast?) it is a distance of 2250 *li* to Wucha (Wunn); to the northeast one reaches the state of Nandou after nine days journey. It adjoins the Da Yuezhi in the northwest and Wuyishan (possibly Herat?)¹¹⁵ in the southwest.¹¹⁶

Chipin must be identified with the modern state of Kashmir, southeast of the Yuezhi yabghu of Xunni (in the Wakhan?) and Zhuangmi (around Chitral?), and southwest of the Gilgit River state of Nandou. The length of nine days journey north to Nandou seems wrong, given that the distance was only 330 *li*, or c. 140 km.¹¹⁷ Far to the west was Herat in southern present-day Afghanistan.

Population/Size: Households: 'many' Individuals: 'many'

'It is a large state'

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms: 'many'

'It is not subject to the protector general'¹¹⁸

Highways/Carriage: 'The land of Chipin is flat and the climate is temperate'

'There is lucerne, with a variety of vegetation and rare trees ... (The inhabitants) grow the five field crops, grapes and various sorts of

¹¹⁴ See also K. Enoki, 'On the Nandou State', in K. Enoki, *Enoki Kuzō Collection Vol. I* (Tokyo 1992) pp. 251-264.

¹¹⁵ See Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 112, n. 250, on proposed locations for Wuyishan.

¹¹⁶ HS 96A 10B.

¹¹⁷ As noted by Wang Hsien-ch'ien: see Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 104, n. 207.

¹¹⁸ HS 96A 10B.

fruit, and they procure them on land, not on the land. 10. And a low and damp production, not from the land, but from the water. 11. The inhabitants are Kashgar and Yarkand, and they are tooled for commercial trade. 12. They are skilled in the arts and crafts with which they make ornaments, and they have markets for their goods.

They use gold and silver to make coins, with the obverse depicting a mounted rider on the obverse and a human face on the reverse.

The state of Chipin (generally identified as the Kashmir Valley, although Narain has argued against this)¹²¹ was substantial in area and population and militarily strong. It was well developed, economically prosperous and issued its own coinage.¹²² Despite a long and generally acrimonious relationship with the Chinese, Chipin had managed to remain independent of the Han (not subject to the Protector General) and the Yuezhi, and indeed had established suzerainty (no doubt under its Saka rulers) over the smaller adjacent state of Nandon. However despite this apparent history of independence, the *Han Shu* account, as suggested above, clearly implies that from sometime between the second half of the second century BCE until as late as the mid-first century CE, the indigenous inhabitants of Kashmir were under the control of the Indo-Scythians, an indirect result of the displacement of the Ili Basin Sakas by the Yuezhi in 162 BCE.

The Migration of the Ili Basin Sakas: Conclusion

It is a crucial *Han Shu* reference, already quoted in part above, that puts this analysis into context:

'When formerly the Xiongnu conquered the Da Yuezhi, the latter moved west and established themselves as master of Daxia; it was in these circumstances that the king of the Sai moved south and established himself as master of Chipin. The Sai states split and separated and repeatedly formed several states. To the northwest of Shide (Kashgar), states such as Xuemin (Irkeshtam) and Zhuantu¹²³ are all of the former Sai race'.¹²⁴

This is convincing evidence that it was the Ili Basin Sakas, forced out of their homeland by the invading Yuezhi in 162 BCE, who migrated over either the Torugart Shankou or Terek Dawan, continued southwards through Irkeshtam (perhaps), Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan and Tashkurgan, and finally crossed the Hanging Pass into Gilgit and Kashmir.¹²⁴ Here at least one group of Scythians would rule for up to 180 years, almost without interruption, until the reign of the last Indo-Scythian satrap of

¹²¹ HS 96A 11A.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Narain (1957) *op. cit.*, pp. 135-6.

¹²⁴ Chavannes located Zhuantu west of Kashgar, on the northern slopes of the Pamirs, in the Kartagin area, in F. Chavannes, 'Les pays d'occident d'après le Wei-luo', in *Tsing Pao* 6 (1905) p. 555, n. 3. However Matsuda placed it near Irkeshtam, in I. Matsuda (Tokyo 1950; 2nd Edition 1970) p. 152 ff.

¹²⁵ HS 96A 10B.

¹²⁶ See Narain (1957) *op. cit.*, pp. 134-5, also A.D.H. Bivar, 'Maues at Taxila: Problems of his arrival route and political allegiance', *Journal of Central Asia* VII, pp. 5-14, on the arrival of the Sakas and the establishment of the Indo-Scythian kingdoms in Kashmir and Taxila. Senior (2001) vol. 1 *op. cit.* p. 49 also supports this conclusion, arguing that the coinage of Maues confirms the Chinese account of one group of Sakas entering northern India via Hazara and Kashmir following their displacement from the Ili Valley by the Yuezhi.

Kashmir, Zeromises Ikhonka. After reaching for up to two decades attempts at conquest by the Indo-Parthian ruler of Kabul, Gondaphares, Zeromises was eventually defeated by Kupula Kadphises of the Kueizhong yabghu, first king of the Kushans, sometime soon after c. 45-50 CE.¹¹ The Sakas then fragmented into a number of smaller state-like divisions and spilled out into the Punjab and Northern India, establishing the significant Saka kingdoms, whose era in Indian history dates from 78 CE. Here they would have come into contact with other groups of Sakas who had been evicted from northern Bactria when the Yuezhi settled north of the Amu Darya in 130 BCE (as will be shown below), and then forced further south again when the Yuezhi occupied Bactria proper after c. 50 BCE. Thus were events that unfolded in the Gansu early in the second century BCE directly responsible for significant developments in the history of ancient Central Asia and India well beyond the area of their immediate impact. The migration of the Ili Basin Sakas that led eventually to the establishment of Saka kingdoms in northern India some 250 years later is a quintessential example of the potent domino-effect of migration in Inner Asian geopolitics, and a further example of the fundamental importance of the Yuezhi to the history of ancient Central Asia.

III

The Wusun Attack and Expel the Yuezhi from the Ili Valley

Events in China: 162-129 BCE

Returning to the Yuezhi following this lengthy digression, after expelling the Saka residents the Yuezhi occupied their lands in the hope of permanently resettling there, and in fact were able to remain in occupation of the fertile Ili Valley for some three decades. The dynasty must have thought they had successfully relocated, having escaped the Xiongnu menace and settled in a region well suited to both agriculture and grazing. The Yuezhi dynasty (and the mixed tribes who paid them allegiance, and who had accompanied them in their migration) probably soon resumed the semi-nomadic, semi-sedentary lifeway each tribal group had followed in the Gansu. The Chinese sources make no specific mention of the Yuezhi's circumstances during their residency in the Ili, although both Sima Qian and Ban Gu do offer views on the lifeway that would be followed by the dynasty and tribes once they had reached Bactria some thirty years later, as will be explored in Chapter Five.

The Ili Basin and the river valleys of northern Bactria were environments conducive to both pastoralism and agriculture, so it is hardly surprising that the evidence indicates that a combination of both lifeway options were adopted simultaneously by the Yuezhi.¹² Thus certain tribal groups of the greater Yuezhi federation would have quickly returned to agriculture, others would have continued to nomadise, and yet others probably adopted elements of both. The tribes that made up the 'Yuezhi' were very familiar with this mix of lifeways (as the evidence from the Gansu indicates), and this would have prepared them well for an immediate transition into a similar mixed mode of existence in areas conducive to it, including both the Ili and northern Bactria. The ruling dynasty itself probably also took tribute from the resident

¹¹ Hulse (2004), pp. 11.

¹² Jordan, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-3 for a detailed description of the landscape around Lake Issyk.

sedentary agriculturists of the wider Ili-Yark-Kul region, and also from anti-nomadising Sakas who remained

Separated by some 1800 kilometres from the Gansu, the Yuezhi must have considered themselves relatively safe from the Xiongnu menace, and well removed from the dangerous theatre of Xiongnu-Han confrontation along the extensive northern and northwestern Chinese borders. As subsequent events suggest, the Xiongnu probably had no intention of pursuing the exiled Yuezhi, preferring instead to quickly resume their focus on opportunities to obtain Han goods either by trade in the market towns along the northern border, or by raiding Chinese provinces. The Xiongnu perhaps also began to consider the untapped potential of the 'Western Regions', now that they had control of the Gansu Corridor, the key to the Tarim Basin. In the years immediately following their defeat of the Yuezhi, however, they simply returned to their old practices.

In 158 BCE Jizhu ('Laoshang') died, and was succeeded as *Shanyu* by Junchen. Han Emperor Wen immediately renewed the former peace treaty, and his ambassador Zhonghang Yue continued to act as advisor to the new *Shanyu*.¹¹⁷ But in the following year Junchen sent 30,000 Xiongnu horsemen on an 'invasion' of Shang and Yunzhong provinces, where they occupied themselves in 'killing and carrying off great numbers of the inhabitants before withdrawing'.¹¹⁸ Wen dispatched three generals with armies to garrison Beidi, the Juzhu Pass in Dai, and the Flying Fox Pass in Zhao, but it took several months for the Chinese troops to reach the border, by which time the Xiongnu had withdrawn far to the north.

In 156 Emperor Wen died and was succeeded by Jing, who was immediately forced to deal with a secret plan hatched between the Chinese King Cho of the Zhao and the Xiongnu. Jing subsequently renewed the peace alliance with the Xiongnu, 'allowing them to buy goods in the markets along the Han border and sending them supplies and a princess of the imperial family, as had been done under the earlier agreements'.¹¹⁹ The situation remained generally peaceful for the next decade and a half until Emperor Jing died and was succeeded in 140 BCE by Wudi. A more detailed discussion of the foreign policy of Wudi, particularly in reference to the emperor's decision to dispatch Zhang Qian in 138 in an attempt to form an alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu, will follow in Chapter Four. But in order to conclude this brief chronological survey of those events in the Han-Xiongnu relationship that occurred while the Yuezhi were peacefully resettled in the Ili Basin, a brief summary is in order.

Sima Qian indicates that, immediately after succeeding to the throne, Wudi continued the policy of appeasement adopted by his predecessors:

He (Wudi) reaffirmed the peace alliance and even treated the Xiongnu with generosity, allowing them to trade in the markets of the border stations and sending them lavish gifts. From the *Shanyu* on down, all the Xiongnu grew friendly with the Han, coming and going along the Great Wall'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ SJ 110, Watson p. 147; and HS 94A.

¹¹⁸ SJ 110, Watson p. 148.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

the 'friendly' peace lasted for six years, although by 138 it appears that Wudi had already decided to pursue a more aggressive policy against the Xiongnu, by dispatching Zhang Qian to the west in an attempt to form an offensive alliance with the Yuezhi. Four years later (in 134), with no word having been received from Zhang Qian (who was a captive of the Xiongnu for a decade, as will be shown below), Wudi's policy became still more confrontational when he sent Nie Wengye, a member of the city of Mayi, to Junchen in an attempt to lure the *Shanyu* into a Han trap at Mayi. By pretending to offer to hand over Mayi to the Xiongnu, Nie Wengye was able to entice Junchen to cross the border and head for the city with a force of 100,000 cavalry. Meanwhile Wudi had concealed 300,000 Han troops near the city, ready to spring the trap. But the *Shanyu* grew suspicious when only some 100 *li* (40 kms) from Mayi, and upon discovering proof of the Han trap led his forces safely back over the border. Immediately the relationship between the Han and Xiongnu soured:

After this the Xiongnu broke off friendly relations with the Han and began to attack the border defences wherever they happened to be. Time and again they crossed the frontier and carried out innumerable plundering raids. At the same time they continued to be as greedy as ever, delighting in the border markets and longing for Han goods, and the Han for its part continued to allow them to trade in the markets in order to spare their resources'.¹⁴¹

This remained the situation until the autumn of 129 BCE, when the Han again attempted to take the initiative by dispatching four generals to launch surprise attacks against the Xiongnu at several of these border market towns, events that are largely outside of the focus of this study.

The Wusun Attack the Yuezhi in the Ili

The Yuezhi probably had little knowledge and even less interest in the continuing evolution of the Han-Xiongnu military and political relationship. They were apparently untroubled by either during their sojourn in the Ili, and seemed intent upon pursuing a peaceful existence. But they had forgotten another old enemy, the Wusun, whom they had defeated and expelled from the Gansu in c. 173 after killing the *Kunmo* Nantoumi, as described in the previous chapter. Events in the Ili were soon to prove, however, that even as the years and decades of successful Yuezhi resettlement passed, the *Kunmo* of the Wusun (the successor of Nantoumi, now grown to adulthood) had not been able to forget the ill-treatment of his people at the hands of the Yuezhi in 173. Sometime in his late thirties or early forties he sought permission from Junchen to pursue the Yuezhi into the Ili and 'avenge his father's wrongs'.¹⁴² For in (probably) 133 or 132 BCE, the *Kunmo* (certainly with Xiongnu blessing and even perhaps assistance) led a force of Wusun horsemen into the Ili, which attacked and routed the no doubt surprised and dismayed Yuezhi, forcing them once again to resume their march to the west. These events are clearly described in the Han sources, following their accounts of the Yuezhi expulsion of the Sakas from the Ili:

...since the *Kunmo* had grown to adulthood he asked permission of the *Shanyu* to avenge his father's wrongs. (and) going west he attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi, and again fled west.¹³³

Later, when the *Kunmo* of Wusun attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi, the Yuezhi migrated to the west... and the *Kunmo* of Wusun took up his residence there.¹³⁴

The date of this attack is difficult to pinpoint exactly, but must have been sometime in the latter part of the fourth decade of the second century BCE.¹³⁵ As will be shown below, Wudi's envoy Zhang Qian was a prisoner of the Xiongnu between 138 and 128 BCE, and it was during his captivity that he was informed by his Xiongnu 'hosts' of the Wusun attack on the Yuezhi: 'When I was living among the Xiongnu I heard of Wusun'¹³⁶ which obviously places the event within the parameters of that decade. Furthermore, as will be argued below, the latter part of the Yuezhi migration (through Ferghana and Sogdiana) was probably completed in a matter of only two or three years, and certainly by 130 the Yuezhi had arrived in northern Bactria, suggesting that their expulsion from the Ili could not have occurred any more than three years earlier.

In addition, the highly militarised Wusun (with 20,000 to 30,000 skilled archers who were 'trained in aggressive warfare',¹³⁷ and potentially up to 200,000 warriors in total)¹³⁸ must have constituted a significant part of the Xiongnu confederation's forces. (Sima Qian noted that the *Shanyu* even ordered the *Kunmo* to 'guard the western forts').¹³⁹ Wusun archers would probably also have been part of the 100,000 strong force that marched on Mayi in 134. Following Wudi's failure to spring his trap, the Xiongnu commenced a new period of regular raiding and plundering to the south, and at the same time the Wusun may have turned their attentions to the northwest. Indeed, it is more than likely that it was during this immediate period of post-Mayi restlessness that the Wusun *Kunmo* 'sought permission of the *Shanyu* to avenge his father's wrongs, (and) going west he attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi'.¹⁴⁰ However Sima Qian somewhat confusingly states that it was after the death of a *Shanyu* that the *Kunmo* led his people far away (and) declared himself an independent ruler'.¹⁴¹ Jizhu was replaced by Junchen in 158 BCE, which is far too early for the events noted above, and it was not until 126 that Junchen was replaced by Yizhixie, which is too late. Sima Qian must therefore be referring not to the attack by the Wusun on the Yuezhi, but to a declaration of political independence from the Xiongnu in the middle of the third decade of the second century.

Clearly the c. 133/132 attack on the Yuezhi in the Ili was no mere raiding party. The Wusun defeated and expelled the Yuezhi and took up residence in the Ili Basin Ysyk-Kul region, there to found the substantial and powerful Wusun 'state', the 'history' of which was subsequently described in considerable detail in both the account of Zhang

¹³³ HS 61.5A.

¹³⁴ HS 96B.1B.

¹³⁵ Nathan suggests c. 135 in Nathan (2000) *op. cit.* p. 31.

¹³⁶ HS 61.1B.

¹³⁷ SL 12A, Watson p. 238.

¹³⁸ HS 96B.1A.

¹³⁹ SL 12A, Watson p. 238.

¹⁴⁰ HS 61.5A.

¹⁴¹ SL 12C, Watson p. 238.

Qian, is recorded in the *Shu Ji*, and the 'Account of the Western Regions' contained in the *Han Shu*.¹⁴² By combining the evidence of both, a detailed picture of Wusun lifeways, politics and events emerges in the newly established Wusun 'state' in the Ili.

The 'State' of the Wusun

Location

The seat of the Greater *Kunmo's* government is at the town of Chigu, and is distant by 8,000 *li* from Changan.¹⁴³

'It is a distance of 1721 *li* to the east, to the Seat of the Protector General, and 5000 *li* to the west, to land within the realm of Kangju'.¹⁴⁴

'The Wusun live some 2000 *li* northeast of Dayuan'.¹⁴⁵

'Wusun adjoins the Xiongnu in the east, Kangju in the northwest, Dayuan in the west and the various states of the walled towns in the south. Originally it was the land of the Sai'.¹⁴⁶

Despite the clearly-irreconcilable nature of some of the distance statistics given, the most obvious location of the Wusun 'state' is the Upper Ili Valley and regions surrounding Ysyk Kul. To the (south)east were the Xiongnu, with the oasis towns of the northern Tarim Basin further to the south(west). Wusun territory may have extended westwards as far as the Upper Syr Darya (Jaxartes), and thus touched upon the Ferghana Valley and Sogdia. Certain later Chinese dynastic historians (and western commentators) have attempted to locate the Wusun anywhere from 'west of the Pamirs' (impossibly, because this was home to the Kushans), to 'south of the Tekes River' (which was indeed probably part of the Wusun realm), and even close to Urumqi (also possible, as the southern extremity of Wusun territory).¹⁴⁷

It was Chavannes who first suggested locating the Wusun in the Ili Valley, as far as Ysyk Kul.¹⁴⁸ This identification was subsequently tacitly accepted by early Russian archaeologists like Gamburg and Gorbunova, without perhaps sufficient material reason to do so in the 1950s and early 60s, although later archaeological research has offered more convincing evidence supporting Chavannes theory, as will be shown below.¹⁴⁹ As Chinese textual references leave little doubt that the land of the Sakas (displaced by the Yuezhi) was also the Ili Valley, the statement that the Wusun homeland was 'originally ... the land of the Sai' is surely further evidence that the Yuezhi displaced the Sakas from the Ili, and were then themselves evicted by the Wusun from the same region. The 'seat of the *Kunmo's* government', Chigu (translated as 'Red Valley'), has been linked with a pure red-coloured valley north of Aksu,¹⁵⁰ or along the upper reaches of the Tekes River (a tributary of the Ili).¹⁵¹

¹⁴² See Pulleyblank (1970) *op. cit.*, pp. 154-160.

¹⁴³ HS 96B 1A.

¹⁴⁴ HS 96B 1B.

¹⁴⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁴⁶ HS 96B 1B.

¹⁴⁷ See Hulsewé and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 343, n. 376, for an extensive discussion of these theories.

¹⁴⁸ Chavannes (1907) *op. cit.*, p. 558, n. 3.

¹⁴⁹ See for example V. Z. Gamburg and N. G. Gorbunova, *Ark tamskil mogilnik* (Moscow 1957), and K. A. Akisev and G. A. Kusaev, *Drevnaya kul'tura Savoy i Usener delny reki Ili* (Alma Ata 1997).

¹⁵⁰ See Hulsewé and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 343, n. 378.

Population Size:	Households: 120,000 Individual: 520,000
Military Strength:	<p>'Wusun is an exceedingly strong state'.</p> <p>Persons able to bear arms: 188,300.¹⁵⁴</p> <p>'They have 20,000 or 30,000 skilled archers and are very daring in battle'.¹⁵⁵</p> <p>'They were originally subjects of the Xiongnu but later, becoming more powerful, they refused any longer to attend the gatherings of the Xiongnu court, though still acknowledging themselves part of the Xiongnu nation'.¹⁵⁶</p> <p>'Formerly (the state) had been in submission to the Xiongnu; later, with the growth of prosperity, the state accepted the need to maintain ties but was unwilling to proceed to their court meetings'.¹⁵⁷</p> <p>'Wusun was close to the Xiongnu, to whom it had been subject for a long period'.¹⁵⁸</p> <p>'His (the Kunmo's) forces gradually grew stronger, and at the death of the <i>Shanyu</i> he was no longer willing to attend at the court of the Xiongnu and serve them. The Xiongnu sent forces to attack him, but they had no success'.¹⁵⁹</p> <p>'... they (the Wusun) are now strong and great'.¹⁶⁰</p>

The deteriorating political relationship between the Wusun and the Xiongnu described in these passages is considered below.

Environment/Lifeways:	'The land is covered in vegetation and is flat. There is heavy rainfall and it is cold, and there are many pine and (elm) trees'. ¹⁶¹
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This appears to be a description of the high pastures and lower mountain slopes above Ysyk Kul, identified by Hermann as the 'Alexandrovski Range', as noted above.

¹⁵⁴ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 91

¹⁵⁵ HS 96B 1A

¹⁵⁶ HS 96B 1B

¹⁵⁷ HS 96B 1A

¹⁵⁸ SI 123, Watson p. 234

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ HS 96B 1B

¹⁶¹ HS 96B 2B

¹⁶² HS 61 5A

¹⁶³ HS 96B 2A

¹⁶⁴ HS 96B 1B

'They do not work at cultivating the fields or planting trees, but in company with their stock animals they go in search of water and pasture. Their way of life is the same as that of the Xiongnu'.¹⁶²

'The people are hard-hearted and greedy; they are unreliable and much given to robbery'.¹⁶³

'The state has numerous horses, and rich persons may own as many as four or five thousand animals'.¹⁶⁴

These passages leave no doubt that the lifeway of the Wusun was essentially one of uncompromising, militarised nomadic pastoralism.

Wusun/Xiongnu Relations c. 133 – 120 BCE

Most of the references to Wusun military strength and their political relationship with the Xiongnu date to after Zhang Qian's return from the west in 126 BCE, by which time it is obvious that the Wusun had become a large, powerful and aggressive tribal confederation. Mallory and Mair point out that if the figures of a population of 630,000 and a military force of 188,000 are to be believed, this renders the Wusun 'over twice as numerous as the entire settled population of the oasis states' (of the Tarim Basin).¹⁶⁵ Even allowing for Han exaggeration, this gives some idea of the size and power of the horde that descended upon the Yuezhi in the Ili Valley.

After evicting the Yuezhi, the Wusun settled in the Ili-Ysyk Kul region and established themselves in a substantial concentration. In their new homeland they initially remained nominally subject to the Xiongnu, but as they became even stronger Wusun officials began to refuse to attend meetings of the Xiongnu court, although they still recognised the need to maintain ties, and even still acknowledged themselves as 'part of the Xiongnu nation'.¹⁶⁶ Upon his return to the Han court in 126 following his failure to draw the Yuezhi into an alliance against the Xiongnu, Zhang Qian suggested that the Han seek an alliance with the Wusun instead, arguing that they might be induced to return east to their former lands near Dunhuang by the offer of marriage to a Han princess. There were substantial strategic gains to be made by the Chinese in their war with the Xiongnu if an alliance with the Wusun could be established.

'If the (people of) the Wusun are able to move east and dwell in their former lands, then Han will send a princess to be (the *Kunnu*'s) wife, and a fraternal alliance will be formed; we will together stand against the Xiongnu who will not be hard to defeat'.¹⁶⁷

'If we could only make use of the present opportunity to send generous presents to Wusun, and induce (its people) to move east and live in their old lands, and if Han would send a princess to be the consort of (the king) and establish brotherly relations,

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁶ *HS*, 96.4, 2B, 51.123; Watson p. 234.

¹⁶⁷ *HS*, 96.4, 2B.

the situation would be such that they would agree, and this would result in cutting off the right arm of the Xiongnu.¹⁶⁹

If we could get them [the Wusun] to obey us, it would be like cutting off the right arm of the Xiongnu.¹⁷⁰ Then, once we had established an alliance with the Wusun, Daxia and the other countries to the west could all be persuaded to come to court and acknowledge themselves our foreign vassal.¹⁷¹

Following a mission to the Wusun led by Zhang Qian between 121 and 119 BE, the *Kunmo* sent envoys to the Han, who observed 'the large numbers of the Han people and the abundance of Han's wealth'.¹⁷² and Wusun agreed to send 1,000 horses to the Han as a betrothal gift for a Han princess, which they had been promised by Zhang Qian.¹⁷³ The Han duly sent a princess of the imperial family, Xizhun (daughter of the King of Zhuangdu), to become the reluctant wife of the Wusun *Kunmo*. The *Han Shu* contains an elaborate account of the princess's attendants and her reception at the Wusun court, including a poem supposedly written by her lamenting her exile in a strange and distant land.¹⁷⁴ The poem itself provides further insight not only into the despair of the princess, but to the lifeway of the Wusun:

'My family married me off to the other side of heaven;
They sent me to a distant, alien land, to the king of the Wusun.
My house is a domed yurt with felt for walls.
My food is meat and my drink is koumiss (fermented milk).
Here I live, constantly thinking of my native land,
Alas my heart is aching;
I wish that I were a yellow swan, flying back to my native home'.¹⁷⁵

The Xiongnu were angered at hearing that the Wusun were in contact with the Han and, anxious to avoid the possibility of an offensive alliance against them, also sent a Xiongnu princess to the Wusun. The *Kunmo* appointed the Han princess 'Lady of the Right', and the Xiongnu princess 'Lady of the Left'.¹⁷⁶ Given that the Xiongnu line of succession was clearly through the 'Wise King of the Left', the appointment of the Xiongnu princess as 'Lady of the Left' indicated that the Wusun still valued their continuing relationship with the Xiongnu more than they did the developing ties with the Han. Eventually the now elderly *Kunmo* gave the Han princess to his grandson Genqu whilst presumably keeping the Xiongnu princess as his own wife, further evidence of where his principal allegiance still lay. Zhang Qian's original plan of enticing the Wusun to return eastwards to restrain the Xiongnu failed, firstly because of a factional split amongst the Wusun, but more particularly because ultimately 'none of the senior officials of Wusun wished to move'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ HS 61.5A.

¹⁷⁰ ST 123, Watson p. 238.

¹⁷¹ HS 96B.2B.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ HS 96B.2A, ST 123, Watson pp. 238-240.

¹⁷⁴ HS 96B.3A. Victor Hui (trans.) in Mallory and Man *op. cit.*, p. 93. Compare this to the more poetic translation in Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.

¹⁷⁵ HS 96B.2B.

¹⁷⁶ HS 96B.2B, ST 123, Watson p. 239.

Further Division Amongst the Da Yuezhi

The *Han Shu* suggests that, as had been the case following the expulsion of the Yuezhi in the Gansu, not all of the Yuezhi remained loyal to the ruling dynasty and main body further to the west. In fact, some of them were expelled and evicted at the hands of the Wusun in 133 or 132.

Later, when the *Emperor* of the Wusun attacked and drove out the Yuezhi, the Yuezhi migrated to the west... and the *Emperor* of the Wusun... It is said: 'For the reason, among the people of Wusun there are two races, the Xiongnu race and the Da Yuezhi race'.

Thus groups (tribes 'yabghus?') of both the Sakan (following their expulsion by the Yuezhi in 162) and now of Yuezhi confederations were quite prepared to remain behind in the Ili and seek some sort of assimilation with the invaders. Given that the Yuezhi and Wusun may both have been Indo-European-speaking descendants of common ancestors, a degree of assimilation between the two is hardly surprising, although integration between the Indo-Iranian-speaking Sakas and the Indo-European-speaking invaders is perhaps more so. As in the case of the 162 split between the Xiao and Da Yuezhi, the particular circumstances of this further attested division within the Yuezhi can only be speculated upon, but the general explanation must be the same. After so many years of successful relocation in their new homeland not all of the Yuezhi would have been happy to resume the uncertain journey.

Their decision might also reflect a specific policy initiative by the Wusun *Khan* to 'split' the Da Yuezhi, by persuading some Yuezhi tribes to support him in return for the right of continued settlement in the fertile Ili Basin, a familiar-enough pattern in pastoral nomadic politics. Furthermore, as has been consistently maintained, the ethnic make-up of many of the great tribal federations of the region, including the Sakas, Xiongnu, Wusun and Yuezhi, was undoubtedly mixed and diverse, particularly in the case of the great migrating horde of Yuezhi who may have picked up numerous other 'rag-tag' elements along the way during their epic journey. It is more accurate to consider that terms like 'Yuezhi', 'Xiongnu' and even (much later) 'Mongol' refer to dynasties ruling over confederations of pastoralist nomads, including tribes of different ethnicities and different languages. As such the yabghu division that would occur in Bactria, and the other splits that seem to have occurred in the Gansu and Ili, were by groups that accepted Yuezhi suzerainty (and therefore in a sense were Yuezhi), but were not necessarily ethnically of the Yuezhi dynasty. The divisions that occurred were essentially along these prevailing and pre-existing tribal-ethnic-linguistic fault lines.

This approach is clearly more realistic than suggesting that the Yuezhi constituted a homogenous ethnic-linguistic tribal entity. As such it is not surprising that the Xiao Yuezhi shared a common ethnic bond with the Qiang Barbarians, or that elements within the Da Yuezhi might have been ethnically related to the Wusun. The 'entity' that migrated to Bactria then, the 'Yuezhi' of the Han sources, was little more than a ruling dynasty, along with the tribes that remained loyal to it. Similarly when the 'Huns' reached Europe some five centuries later, the name 'Hun' preserved little more than a distant memory of dynastic links to the Xiongnu. The tri-

referring to a confederation of ethnically-diverse peoples by the name of the ruling dynasty was well established in Central Asia by the second century BCE, and would soon be continued in Bactria when a new controlling dynasty, that grew out of the Yuezhi federation (the 'Kuei-zhuang') would assume power over the broader Yuezhi, reunite the five yabghus, and give its name to the subsequent state and empire of the 'Kushans'.

V

Archaeological Evidence for the Sakan, Yuezhi and Wusun Occupations of the Ili Valley/Ysyk Kul Region

As is the case with archaeological evidence of the Yuezhi in the Gansu and Xinjiang, material evidence of the events described in the Han sources relating to the Yuezhi's occupation of the Ili and Ysyk Kul Basins is limited and inconclusive. Soviet and Russian archaeologists have a long tradition of research in regions north of the Tien Shan, including the Ili Basin and the Semirech'ie, which has gradually allowed for the (often tentative) identification of each of the principal nomadic pastoralist groups mentioned by the sources as being active in the area during the Han period. The study of Sakan and Wusun burials in these regions began with the work of Bernshtam, who initially ascribed tombs uncovered by his expeditions to the Sakas, and dated them to between the seventh and fourth centuries BCE.¹⁷⁷ Bernshtam later identified subsequent discoveries of different tomb types as Wusun, and dated them to between the third and first centuries.¹⁷⁸ The difficulty for Soviet and Russian scholars has been to link specific burial structures with the various migrants, or with 'indigenous' pastoralists (if pastoralists can ever truly be said to be indigenous). As Gorbunova puts it:

'To sum up, we can observe two trends in the interpretation of early nomadic sites in different parts of the region. Some of the scholars associate the distribution of such sites with the migrations of Central Asian or Sarmatian tribes, while others see them as relics of local nomadic cattle-breeders, though admitting the possibility of alien infiltration'.¹⁷⁹

As noted in the previous chapter, the three specific tomb types that have been recorded across former Soviet Central Asia are ground-level burials, catacombs and podboys. The earliest known examples of ground-level burial structures (made of stone or brick) come from the Uzboi, Usturt and Lower Syr Darya regions, with later examples recorded in the Fergana Valley. Early examples of catacombs (divided into three sub-types according to their directional orientation and dromos length) have been discovered in Khorezmia and Sogdia, but in general are more characteristic of the Middle Amu Darya and Zeravshan valleys. However, one particular catacomb type - where the end chamber is perpendicular to a short dromos and is oriented in an east-west direction - is common both in Fergana and north of the Tien Shan. Podboy tombs, it will be remembered, are side chambers in the long wall of a shaft, located either in the east or west wall, or the north or south, depending on the

¹⁷⁷ A. N. Bernshtam, *Istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki T'ian-Shania i Pamiro-Alaia. Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii SSSR* (Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Tien Shan and Pamiro-Alai Regions. Materials and Studies in the Archaeology of the USSR) no. 26 (Moscow 1952).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 35.

arrangement of the chamber. In all three tomb types, the dead were placed on the floor (either directly or on reed mats), and the orientation of the body was in accordance with the general directional orientation of the tomb.

Of most relevance to the first stage of the Yuezhi migration into the Ili Valley, and to their interaction with the Sakan residents and later Wusun invaders, is research carried out in the early 1960s by Akishev and Kushaev, and subsequent attempts at interpretation of their initial conclusions by Zadneprovsky. By 1963, when Akishev and Kushaev first published their results, some 370 burial sites had been recorded.¹⁷⁹ According to Zadneprovsky, of the 370, 80% were ground pit burial types identifiable as Sakan tombs, while 17% were in podboys.¹⁸⁰ A substantial number of other tombs have been unearthed in the region since the 1960s, although very little of this research has so far been published. Zadneprovsky suggests that the isolated podboy tombs are at least partly contemporary with (and similar in construction to) the burial structures found at the Haladun site in the Gansu, and that the frequency of this particular tomb type increased in the region during the second and first centuries BCE, in line with the chronology of textual evidence for the migration of the Yuezhi into regions north of the Tien Shan from c. 162 BCE considered above.¹⁸¹

A series of tombs discovered at the Alwighul (Alagou) complex of sites near Turpan (southeastern Tien Shan) have tentatively been ascribed to either the Sakas or the pre-migrational Wusun, because of their similarity to other tombs uncovered in the Ysyk Kul region. These four tombs at Alwighul are on a vast scale, measuring some 200 cubic metres in volume.¹⁸² The base was filled with sand and stones, on top of which a large timber chamber of pine (complete with pine roof) had been constructed. The relatively small number of deceased may have been covered with red pigment and were accompanied by a rich assortment of ornaments (including some 200 pieces of gold). The burials thus appear to be of aristocrats, and the tombs have been dated to the third or second centuries BCE. Because the architecture of the tombs closely resembles the royal tombs of Pazyryk in the Altai and tombs discovered near Ysyk Kul in Kazakhstan, they have been tentatively identified as either Saka, or as Wusun prior to their 133/132 invasion of the region.¹⁸³

In fact putative Sakan tombs have been identified at a wide range of Inner Asia sites, from Tashkurgan to the Ili Basin. The cemetery at Shambabay (Xiangbaobao) near Tashkurgan contains forty tombs covered with stone cairns in which seventeen inhumation burials identified as Saka have been discovered, arguably further evidence of the migration of the Sakas through the western Tarim and over the Hanging Pass.¹⁸⁴ More numerous are Saka cemeteries north of the Tien Shan, including Zhongyangchang where thirty great mounds (up to 300 metres in diameter and over 10 metres high) have yielded rich finds of bronze and iron objects, both weapons and ornaments. The nearby site at Shota (Xiatai) in the Ili Valley has revealed 13 skulls, of which 11 were Caucasoid and the remaining two Mongoloid females. At Kunas

¹⁷⁹ K. A. Akishev and G. A. Kushaev, *Drevnaya kul'tura sakov i usunov doliny reki Ili* (Ancient Cultures of the Saka and Wusun in the Ili Valley) (Almaty 1963).

¹⁸⁰ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Mallory and Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 162.

also in the Ili a chance find of bronzes, which included a cauldron and a tray, also contained a sculpture of a bare-chested (Caucasoid) man kneeling on one knee, and wearing a pleated skirt and distinctive wide-brimmed hat. Holes in his hands suggest that he originally held banners or weapons.¹⁸⁶ Other burials at Mongghul Kura (Zhaosu), where a cemetery of kurgans arranged in a north-south row has been uncovered, have been attributed to the Wusun. Like those at Pazyryk they are constructed of an outer and inner timber chamber, the latter covered in felt. The deceased were placed in wooden coffins, also covered in felt.¹⁸⁷

The burial site at Issyk, fifty miles east of Almaty, has also yielded impressive evidence of pastoral nomadism in the region, but although Akishev identified the tomb as Saka, its specific ascription is difficult.¹⁸⁸ The single intact tomb is of a male dressed in gold-covered clothing with a long sword and dagger in his belt, although as Jacobsen argues, 'neither his clothing nor his tall headdress were appropriate for battle'.¹⁸⁹ Accompanying the body were trays, ladles, bowls and jugs. His headdress was decorated with realistic horse designs, and a twisted horse ornamented the tip of the dagger. Images decorating the headdress resonated with the image of the environment in which the tomb was discovered, recreating an untamed and realistic mountain landscape complete with tigers and a wild sheep.¹⁹⁰

Clearly the archaeological evidence of the presence of different nomadic pastoralists in the Ili Basin and contiguous areas during the approximate time frame suggested by the Han sources (approximately third to first centuries BCE) is indisputable, but the attribution of various sites to specific 'peoples' or tribes is far more problematic. Zadneprovsky's attempts to identify the podboy tombs of the Semirechie as Yuezhi, based on their similarity to other podboys excavated at Haladun and in Ferghana, Sogdia and Bactria (as will be considered below) is the most promising attribution of potential Yuezhi funerary monuments so far proposed, but is far from proven. Attribution of other sites as definitely Sakan or Wusun is also only tentative at best. Mallory and Mair, who are more aware than many of the difficulties of nomadic pastoralist tomb identification, sum-up the problem thus:

'Although sites or even cultures may meet the general requirements of the "Saka" (for example), they tend to be so loose that it is always possible we are dealing with different historical or ethnic groups, albeit inheritors or participants of the great Eurasian continuum of Iron Age steppeland cultures'.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 162-3 for information and an illustration of this intriguing bronze statue.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁸⁸ See K. A. Akishev, *Kurgan Issyk. Iskusstvo sakov Kazakhstana* (The Issyk Kurgan. Art of the Kazakhstan Sakas) (Moscow 1978); K. A. Akishev, *The Art and Mythology of the Sakas* (Alma Ata 1984). R. Rolle, *The World of the Scythians* (London 1989) p. 47 provides an excellent description of the body and accompanying inventory, including the impressive 26 inch high headdress. There are still substantial numbers of Sakan (?) burial mounds in the Issyk Kul region awaiting excavation, particularly large mounds on both sides of the road just west of the village of Delovodsk and in the Katkara Valley just across the Kazakh border.

¹⁸⁹ I. Jacobsen, 'Symbolic Structures as Indicators of the Cultural Ecology of the Early Nomads', in G. Seaman, ed., *Foundations of Empire: Archaeology and Art of the Eurasian Steppes* vol. 3 (Los Angeles 1992), p. 4. See also Jacobsen (1987) *op. cit.* on the general issue of the inclusion of domestic furnishings in burials said to be those of warriors.

¹⁹⁰ Artefacts discovered at the Issyk site are illustrated in V. N. Bastlov, ed., *Nomads of Eurasia*, trans. M. A. Zdan (Los Angeles 1989) pp. 24-33.

¹⁹¹ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.* p. 163.

Conclusion: The Migration of the Yuezhi (Stage One)

In summary then, the Han sources, reinforced by a reference in Ptolemy and tentative archaeological evidence, suggest the following sequence of events in the Gansu, the Ili Valley-Ysyk Kul region and the western Tarim Basin between 162 and 132 BCE. The defeated Yuezhi, under the heir and successor of their dead king, clearly thought they had no other option remaining to them than to migrate, following their disastrous defeat by the Xiongnu under Jizhu in 162. Although the successor of the slain ruler is generally understood to have been the *son* of the beheaded king, textual ambiguities allow for the possibility that it may have been a woman, the slain king's 'principal consort'. The Hulsewe and Loewe translation of the relevant *Han Shu* passage reads: 'The king of the Da Yuezhi had been killed by the nomads, and his *wife* had been established as king (sic)'.⁹²

The decision of the dynasty to migrate, despite still apparently having a substantial military force at their disposal, indicates not only the severity of the 162 defeat, but also several decades of declining Yuezhi fortunes in the face of evolving Xiongnu superiority and aggression. In the light of the obvious realignment in the power balance along China's northern borders since Maodun had assumed the leadership of the Xiongnu, the Yuezhi dynasty might have considered a move away from the region several times, particularly during the decade and a half between their twin defeats at the hands of the Xiongnu in 176 and 162. The Yuezhi's (possibly planned) intention was to move a substantial distance to the northwest and resettle in the valley of the Ili River, a region occupied by a Sakan confederation. They had no intention, nor indeed any idea, that this would only be the first stage of a migration which ultimately would take them half away across Inner Asia, until they would find themselves thirty years later on the banks of the Amu Darya in northern Bactria.

Leaving the Gansu sometime in 162, the Yuezhi headed northwest towards the valley of the Ili River which drains into Lake Balkash. Their route may have more or less followed the major Xinjiang highway of today through Hami and Urumqi, north of the Tien Shan Mountains, and then due west to the long Ili River Valley, or perhaps initially west and north towards Turpan, and then to Urumqi and the Ili. Whether they settled in the eastern Ili (i.e. along that part of the valley within contemporary Xinjiang) or further west and north of Ysyk Kul in the general vicinity, or just to the north of, present-day Almay in Kazakhstan, is unknown – there is insufficient textual or archaeological evidence for a more precise location. This journey may have taken some months to complete, but probably less than a year, so that they would have arrived in the Ili region later that same year, i.e. in 162 BCE.

Incidental evidence of their relocation is provided by Ptolemy who mentions a group called the *Togouratoi* (a variant of 'Tocharian') dwelling near Ysyk Kul.⁹³ Archaeological evidence of Yuezhi occupation of the Ili Basin is inconclusive, but Zadneprovsky has pointed out that a substantial number of podboy structures (which he attributes to the Yuezhi) have been unearthed in the area. Other tombs attributed to

⁹² HS 61.7A.

⁹³ *Prod. Geogr.* vi, 14, 7-14.

the autonomous Saka occupants of the region, and to the Wusun, who invaded the Ili Basin three decades after the arrival of the Yuezhi, have also been excavated. In fact, of the 370 burial sites known in the region by as early as 1960, 80% were in pits, and attributed to the autonomous Sakas (or Wusun), while 17% were of the pit-burial type.¹⁹⁴

The Chinese sources state that the region was already populated by the Sai people, probably a group of Indo-Iranian-speaking Sakas. The Yuezhi, according to Ban Gu, 'attacked the king of the Sai. The king of the Sai moved a considerable distance to the south and the Yuezhi then occupied his lands'.¹⁹⁵ Most (although not all) of these displaced Sakas were consequently forced to undertake their own substantial migration, moving west and then south into the Tarim Basin and around the western edge of the Taklamakan. During the course of their migration the main body probably splintered into a number of smaller groups who occupied various oasis-settlements (including Kashgar and Khotan) along the way. Many of the Ili Valley Sakas followed their king (the *Sai wang*) further south, crossing over the high and dangerous 'Suspended Crossing' (the Khunjerab Pass or similar) before conquering and settling in Kashmir.¹⁹⁶ The Ili Basin Sakas should not be confused with another Saka group which would be displaced from valleys to the north of the Oxus by the Yuezhi during the later part of their migration further west, and who in turn would be forced to move into Bactria proper and beyond, events considered in Chapter Five. Not all of the Sakas of the Ili Basin fled, however, and both textual and archaeological evidence indicates a degree of assimilation into the broader Yuezhi (and later Wusun) confederacies.

The Yuezhi claimed the former Saka lands in the hope of permanently resettling there, and remained in occupation for some three decades. The dynasty must have thought they had successfully migrated, having escaped the Xiongnu menace and relocated in fertile lands. The Yuezhi and their associated tribes probably resumed their former mixed semi-nomadic/semi-sedentary lifeways and no doubt began to lose interest in affairs further to the south and east. However, the *Kunmo* of the Wusun could not forget the ill-treatment of his people at the hands of the Yuezhi in 173, and he eventually sought permission from his Xiongnu overlord Juchien to pursue the Yuezhi into the Ili and 'avenge his father's wrongs'.¹⁹⁷ In 133 or 132 BCE (probably) the *Kunmo* led a powerful force of Wusun mounted archers into the Ili, which attacked and routed the undoubtedly dismayed Yuezhi, forcing them to once again resume their long to the west.

After so many years of semi-sedentism it's hardly surprising that not all of the Yuezhi were prepared to resume the journey. Sima Qian had previously noted that, following the decision to quit the Gansu in 162, 'a small number of (Yuezhi) who were unable to make the journey west sought refuge among the Qiang Barbarians in the Southern Mountains, where they are known as the Lesser Yuezhi'.¹⁹⁸ The *Han Shu* also mentions the Lesser (or *Xiao*) Yuezhi, and their assimilation with the tribes of the

¹⁹⁴ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, pp 4-5.

¹⁹⁵ HS 61.4B.

¹⁹⁶ HS 61.4B, 96A.10B.

¹⁹⁷ HS 61.4B.

¹⁹⁸ ST 123, Watson p. 234.

Southern Mountains.¹⁹⁹ The Xiao Yuezhi might have been weaker elements that fled into the Lien Shan valleys for protection from the marauding Xiongnu. More probably though, given our knowledge of subsequent tribal yabghu divisions, the Xiao Yuezhi probably represented an additional distinct tribal or ethnic subgroup within the broader Yuezhi confederacy. They may even have shared a closer common ethnicity or cultural bond with the Qiang Barbarians than they did with the ruling dynasty of the Yuezhi, preferring to return to the homelands of their fellow nomads in the valleys of the Southern Mountains (Qilian Shan Qinghai Plateau) than face an uncertain future in the west.

Following their later defeat and eviction at the hands of the Wusun in 133/2, another sub-group of the Greater (or Da) Yuezhi apparently also chose not to continue the migration westwards with the bulk of the confederation. The *Han Shu* notes that groups of both Sakas and Yuezhi remained in the Ili Basin to be assimilated with the Wusun: 'For this reason among the people of the Wusun there are (elements of) the Sai race and the Da Yuezhi race'.²⁰⁰ The Sakas must have been remnants of the original occupants of the Ili who had been absorbed into the Yuezhi federation in 162, and members of both the Saka and Yuezhi confederacies then similarly decided to remain in the region following the Wusun invasion. This decision reflects a familiar pattern in pastoral nomadic politics, where both the Yuezhi king and later the Wusun *Kunmo* were able to persuade elements of the resident peoples of the region to split from the ruling dynasty and support the Yuezhi and Wusun occupations of the Ili, in return for the right to remain settled in the region.

This suggests that, as has often been the case in Inner Asian history, the ethnic make-up of many of both the Yuezhi and Wusun, and indeed of all the great tribal nomadic states, was mixed and diverse. Thus terms like 'Yuezhi', 'Wusun' and 'Mongol' more accurately refer to dynasties ruling over confederations of pastoral nomads, including tribes of different ethnicities and different languages. As such the yabghu division refers to groups that accepted Yuezhi suzerainty (and therefore in a sense were Yuezhi), but were not necessarily ethnically Yuezhi. Such splits that then occurred along yabghu lines (in the Gansu, the Ili Basin and later in Bactria) were essentially along these prevailing and pre-existing tribal-ethnic-linguistic fault lines. It is not surprising that elements within the broader Yuezhi federation may have shared a common ethnic bond with the Qiang Barbarians, or indeed with the Wusun (particularly as the latter may have also been Indo-European speakers), given the apparent absorption of Yuezhi elements into their midst. The entity that migrated to Bactria was little more than a ruling dynasty, along with the tribes that remained with them. This tradition of referring to a confederation of ethnically diverse people by the name of the ruling dynasty was well established in Central Asia, and would be continued in Bactria nearly two centuries later, when a new controlling dynasty that grew out of the Yuezhi confederation (and which may have had little or nothing in common ethnically with the 'original' Yuezhi dynasty) would assume power over that grouping, and give its name to the subsequent Empire of the Kueizhuang, or Kushans.

Migration of the Da Yuezhi Stage Two: From the Ili to the Amu Darya

Introduction

Han Policy Initiatives against the Xiongnu in 139 BCE

It appears from the sources that the Han had only very limited knowledge of events in the Ili Basin between the departure of the Yuezhi in 162 BCE, and their subsequent defeat and eviction at the hands of the Wusun in 133-2. As a result, significant political events in the region – including the expulsion and migration of the Sakas from the Ili to Kashmir, the thirty year residency of the Yuezhi in the Saka's former Ili basin homeland, and the subsequent defeat and eviction of the Da Yuezhi by the Wusun – were all probably unknown to the Han court prior to the mission of Zhang Qian. Indeed, as will be recalled from Chapter Two, according to the sources the Chinese only learned of the final defeat of the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu sometime after the accession of Wudi in 140 BCE, i.e. in the Jianyuan era (140-135).¹

This means that although the third and most devastating defeat of the Yuezhi can be dated to c. 162 BCE, it was not until some time (presumably early) in the Jianyuan era that the news of this critical event even reached the Han court. This delay in the provision of important information suggests that the Xiongnu had erected an effective intelligence barrier between Han China and the 'Western Regions', a barrier that was only really breached for the first time by the Chinese with the mission of Zhang Qian. This lack of information might also have been an unintended product of Chinese isolationism, even of specific Han policy. Following the renewal of peace with the Xiongnu agreed to by Jizhu and Emperor Wen in 162, Wen passed an edict forbidding both Xiongnu and Chinese from crossing the border on pain of execution: 'The Xiongnu shall not enter within our borders, nor shall the Han forces venture beyond the frontier. Anyone who violates this agreement shall be executed'.² Thus, even though border contacts no doubt continued (and certainly Han officials kept sending tribute and food to the Xiongnu on a regular basis), individuals or groups on both sides would be less likely to admit to it, and information on the political and military relationship between the Xiongnu and other 'barbarian peoples' of the north and west might not have filtered through very easily at all.³

Isolated or not from events beyond her western borders, the ongoing tension between the Chinese and the Xiongnu continued to dominate Han foreign policy during those 'lost' two decades. With the succession of Junchen as *Shanyu* in 158, the Xiongnu had resumed their raids into Chinese territory (Shang and Yunzhong provinces in particular) before hatching a plot against the Chinese with the help of King Cho of the

¹ S. 123, Watson p. 231; HS 61.1a.

² S. 110, Watson p. 147.

³ *Ibid.*

the Han Emperor Jing was able to deal with the plot, however, and then persuade the Xiongnu to renew the peace treaty soon after 156. The succession of 'peace treaties' negotiated by the Han court with the Xiongnu leadership were always on terms more favourable to the nomads, in that as well as facilitating mercantile opportunities, the nomads also agreed to effectively pay tribute to the Xiongnu. Sima Qian provides evidence of this tributary relationship, noting that the Han sent 'supplies and a success of the imperial family' and 'lavish gifts' to the *Shanyu*.⁵ Bartfield has argued that the Xiongnu 'empire' actually derived much of its stability from this exploitation of China, achieved initially through direct trading:

However, in time most of their revenue was derived more indirectly through increasingly generous peace treaties disguised under the cloak of the 'tributary system' in which the nomads promised peace in return for trade and subsidies.⁶

As such, the Xiongnu needed to do little more than periodically raid Chinese territory as a reminder to the Han of what they were capable of, in order to encourage the Chinese court to continue paying tribute and thus maintain the peace. Emperor Jing's treaty remained in place until six years into the reign of his successor Wudi, which commenced in 140 BCE. The new emperor initially maintained the existing policy of non-aggression towards the Xiongnu, and there was no outbreak of open conflict between them until the Mayi incident of 134 BCE. With no apparent military contact whatsoever between the Han and Xiongnu until 134 then, the Xiongnu 'deserters' who had 'surrendered to the Han' some time between 140 and 135 may simply have been traders or adventurers attracted into Chinese territory by the generally stable and beneficial mercantile relationship that had developed between the Han and Xiongnu during this relatively long period of peace. Sima Qian made a point of describing this more 'relaxed' atmosphere in a reference already noted in the preceding chapter: 'From the *Shanyu* on down, all the Xiongnu grew friendly with the Han, coming and going along the Great Wall'.⁷

Subsequent events suggest, however, that Wudi may have been pursuing a more proactive, longer-term agenda, perhaps even deliberately lulling the Xiongnu into a false sense of confidence concerning Han intentions. It may be that the 'deserters' were actually Xiongnu informers paid in some way by the Han to provide intelligence on affairs beyond the Great Walls (although this is speculation on my part), preparatory to the commencement of a new campaign against the Xiongnu at the first suitable opportunity. An important component of that strategy may have been an attempt to form an offensive alliance with the Yuezhi against their common Xiongnu foes. That the Chinese had been aware of the existence and strength of the Yuezhi for many centuries is unquestioned, as the numerous Zhou, Qin and Han Dynastic references already noted testify. Once the Xiongnu became an even more serious problem for the Chinese (after the accession of Maodun in 209 BCE), thoughts of an alliance with the Yuezhi may have been seriously though periodically entertained by Han officials. As was argued in the previous chapter, the Xiongnu probably also feared the prospect of such an alliance, and their campaigns against the Yuezhi in 207, 176 and 162 may have been conducted, at least in part, with the motive of heading off any possible offensive pact against them, as well as to secure the strategic Gansu Corridor.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶ Bartfield (1991) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁷ SJ 119, Watson p. 148.

Certainly Narain is convinced that 'Jizhi had not forgotten the Yuezhi, who were still living close to the Xiongnu and had been very powerful only a decade ago. It would have been foolish on the part of the Han to do so for they formed a potential ally with the Han'.

Torday argues for an even more practical motive in the recruitment of Zhang Qian by Wudi – the acquisition of intelligence. With Wudi surely unimpressed that such significant information had been effectively kept from the Han court for twenty-two years, his first priority before determining any new policy to deal with the Xiongnu was probably to obtain information on events in the Gansu and beyond. This would also partly explain why Zhang Qian's party seemed so inexperienced and inadequate for the vital mission of attempting to forge an 'offensive alliance' with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu. As Torday argues:

'Chang's embassy had such modest proportions, its resources were so meagre, and the hazards of the journey so formidable ... no one could have reasonably expected it to achieve its stated aim. A more credible explanation for the venture would be to regard it as an intelligence mission staffed with expendable personnel'.

A range of motives was no doubt playing on Wudi's mind when he conceived of the mission, including both the acquisition of intelligence and the sounding out of a possible alliance with the Yuezhi, as two parts of a wider policy initiative against the Xiongnu. The Han sources refer only to the aim of forming an alliance against their enemy. Whatever his private thoughts may have been on the matter, the young Wudi, upon receiving the information from his informants that the Xiongnu had defeated and evicted the Yuezhi in 162, subsequently conceived (or revisited) a plan to attempt to forge a strategic alliance with the expelled Yuezhi against their common enemy. The Han sources are in no doubt that this was part of a wider strategy to confront the Xiongnu:

'As it happened the Han was wishing to start operations to eliminate the nomads (Xiongnu), and hearing of this report (about the defeat and expulsion of the Yuezhi) wished to make contact by means of envoys ...'

'The Han at this time was engaged in a concerted effort to destroy the Xiongnu, and therefore, when the emperor heard this, he decided to try and send an envoy to establish relations with the Yuezhi'.

Watson's translation of the relevant passage in the *Shi Ji* suggests that the Han were engaged in a concerted effort to destroy the Xiongnu; but the passage might also be translated to read 'were planning a concerted effort', which equates more closely to Ban Gu's comment that the Han 'were wishing to start operations to eliminate the nomads'. While Narain argues that 'it became necessary for the Han to make a concerted effort to destroy the Xiongnu',¹² this is not supported by evidence of the

¹² Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹³ Torday (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 91.

The text actually says the Hu, but this general term must have referred to the Xiongnu given the date of reference.

HS 61.1A.

SI 1.23, Watson p. 231.

Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 25.

relatively peaceful and harmonious relationship between the Chinese and the Xiongnu during this period.

In fact, the first half-dozen years of Wudi's reign can only be described as a period of relative peace, and there is no evidence whatsoever of any confrontational or pre-emptive campaign against the 'barbarians'. Wudi was only a young man of 15 years when he attained the throne, and was unlikely to have suddenly reversed the policy of previous venerated emperors by immediately attacking the Xiongnu. Sima Qian actually goes out of his way to record how good relations with the Xiongnu were at the beginning of the young emperor's reign. Despite this it appears that (probably in the year 139 BCE), only a year after the accession of Wudi and in the midst of this period of unprecedented peace, the Han Court under the direction of the now seventeen-year-old Emperor apparently decided to turn to the Yuezhi in the hope of forming an alliance against their 'common enemy', or at least acquire much-needed intelligence in the attempt.

Sima Qian may have been pursuing an anti-Wudi propaganda agenda of his own (he was later castrated at the order of Wudi) in inferring, as he seems to do, that the Emperor's foreign policy actions were those of a warmonger intent upon forcing a renewal of hostilities with the Xiongnu in the midst of this period of peace. But Wudi's intention in sending Zhang Qian to find the Yuezhi and seek an alliance should not be interpreted as a precursor to an imminent Chinese attack on the Xiongnu, because the Han Court between 140 and 134 BCE was dominated by ministers and advisors who were strongly against war with the *Shanyu*.¹³

Perhaps Zhang Qian's mission should be viewed as part of a *defensive* rather than offensive strategy, the testing out of a tentative plan to use barbarians against barbarians. With the Yuezhi having resettled not terribly far away in the Ili Basin (as far as the Han Court, if they knew anything at all, was probably aware), Wudi may well have entertained serious hopes of enticing them back to the Gansu to re-engage their common enemy, particularly as the Yuezhi were described as 'bearing a constant grudge against' the Xiongnu. No one was to know, of course, that the Han ambassador would be delayed for a decade on his mission, and that by the time he caught up with the Yuezhi they would be so far removed from the Han/Xiongnu conflict as to have no intention of returning. But whatever its ultimate strategic intention, the implementation of Wudi's plan required the immediate recruitment of an envoy who would seek out the Yuezhi and attempt to forge an alliance. While this apparent policy aim was never achieved, the mission of that envoy to the west was to prove one of the most significant journeys in the history of ancient Eurasia.

1

Zhang Qian's Mission to the West

Stage One: Recruitment - Capture - Journey to Ferghana

Both the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* provide limited biographical information on the early career and recruitment of Han envoy, Zhang Qian:

¹³ I am grateful to Jonathan Markley of Macquarie University for his valuable thoughts on Sima Qian's account of Wudi's motive in sending Zhang Qian to pursue the Yuezhi.

Zhang Qian was a man of the Lanzhou commanderies.¹⁴ During the early period Hanxian he served as a gentleman.

Zhang Qian was a native of Lanzhou and served as a palace attendant during the Hanxian era.¹⁵

Early in his reign Wudi began the search for a suitable man to lead the Han mission to the Yuezhi, no easy task given that 'their route would perforce have to pass through the Xiongnu'.¹⁶ Ban Gu's observation indicates that following their eviction of the Yuezhi from their homeland, elements of the Xiongnu (probably under the leadership of the Wise King of the Right) had remained in occupation of the Gansu, the strategic significance of which would have been obvious to the *Shanyu*. Zhang Qian's limited route options to the Ili Valley would also inevitably have to take him through the Gansu, then northwest towards Ferghana, following more or less the same route taken by the migrating Yuezhi. Wudi's call was answered by Zhang Qian:

'A call was then made for persons able to undertake the mission. In his capacity as gentleman, Qian answered the call and was sent to the Yuezhi'.¹⁷

'The emperor accordingly sent out a summons for men capable of undertaking such a mission. Zhang Qian, who was a palace attendant at the time, answered the summons and was appointed as envoy to the Yuezhi'.¹⁸

Zhang Qian most probably set out in 139 or 138 BCE¹⁹ (although Naram suggests 136²⁰ from Longxi (in the eastern Gansu, south east of Lanzhou) and 'travelled west through the territory of the Xiongnu'.²¹ Despite taking 'the short route through the Xiongnu',²² he was almost immediately captured by their forces, and transported to the headquarters of the *Shanyu*, the precise location of which is not revealed by the sources. Early in Maodun's reign the Right Wise King was based on the Ordos River, but following the 176 attack on the Yuezhi he was probably relocated somewhere in the easternmost foothills of the Tien Shan. Torday argues that the most likely suitable

¹⁴ Yen Shiku quotes the lost *Ipu Chichun Chuan* by Chen Shou, which states that Zhang Qian's home was near present day Chengku in Shensi province. See R. de Crespigny, *The Record of the Three Kingdoms, a study in the historiography of San kao Chih*, Occasional Paper No. 9 (Centre of Oriental Studies, Australian National University, Canberra 1970) p. 85.

¹⁵ HS 61.1A.

¹⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 231.

¹⁷ HS 61.1A.

¹⁸ HS 61.1B.

¹⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 231.

²⁰ These dates are derived through the following reasoning. In 126 Junchen was controversially succeeded by Yizhixie as *Shanyu*. Sima Qian (SJ 123, Watson p. 232) makes the point that during the turmoil that followed in Xiongnu ranks, Zhang Qian was able to escape from his captors for a second time, and thus return to Xian probably early in 125. Working backwards, if he was captured by the Xiongnu this second time in 127 or early 126, and spent the two previous years with the Yuezhi and in Bactria, he must have arrived at the Yuezhi's principal settlement in either 129 or 128. Prior to that he spent ten years in captivity with the Xiongnu (the first time) which means he must have set out in 139 or 138. There is admittedly a legendary ring about the idea of an absence of thirteen years, associated with a story of Confucius wandering for exactly the same number of years, but these dates fit very closely with the other known chronological facts and cannot be too easily dismissed.

²¹ Naram (2000) *op. cit.* p. 25.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ HS 61.1A.

location could have been Lake Barkul, north of Hami.²⁴ This small basin was eminently defensible and gave rapid access towards Turlan and the west, Lou-Lan and the Fisin Giol, and the main route northwest from the Gansu corridor towards the Ili Basin, the route Zhang Qian must have taken. As Naram suggests, there was no other alternative to this route,²⁵ and the traveller and his party would therefore have been all-too-easy to detect by Xiongnu lookouts.

The *Shanyu* was unimpressed by Zhang Qian's attempt to pass through his territory:

'The *Shanyu* said: "The Yuezhi lie to the north of us, how may Han send its envoys there? If I wished to send envoys to the Yue, would Han be willing to let me do so?"'²⁶

Watson's translation of Sima Qian is even blunter:

'The *Shanyu* detained them and refused to let them proceed. "The Yuezhi people live to the north of me", he said. "What does the Han mean by trying to send an envoy to them? Do you suppose that if I tried to send an embassy to the kingdom of Yue in the southeast the Han would let my men pass through China?"'²⁷

The Yue were the 'Southern Yue' who dwelt in independent communities in far southern China and northern Vietnam until the Chinese conquered the region in 112 BC.²⁸ The fact that the *Shanyu* knew of the Yue at all suggests that Xiongnu intelligence was some way in advance of Han, highlighting further the Han's pressing need for information. The Xiongnu kept Zhang Qian in 'gentlemanly detention' for a decade (or just over), but despite marrying a Xiongnu bride and fathering a child, the envoy never forgot his mission and was eventually able to escape and resume his pursuit of the Yuezhi.

'For over ten years he [the *Shanyu*] detained Zhang Qian, giving him a wife to whom he had children. However Qian constantly retained the Han emblems of authority without loss. Living in the western part of the Xiongnu he found an opportunity to escape with his followers in the direction of the Yuezhi, and after speeding west for days numbered by the ten he reached Dayuan'.²⁹

The *Han Shu* notes that Zhang Qian was detained in the 'western part' of Xiongnu territory, which again most probably means somewhere along the route through to the Ili Valley. Watson's translation of Sima Qian provides the additional information that Zhang Qian's wife actually bore him a son, and (with, at face value, apparently greater precision than Ban Gu) that the journey to Dayuan took between twenty and thirty days:

'The Xiongnu detained Zhang Qian for over ten years and gave him a wife from their own people, by whom he had a son. Zhang Qian never once relinquished the imperial credentials that marked him as an envoy of the Han, however, and after he had lived in Xiongnu territory for some time he was less closely watched than at first, he and his

²⁴ Jordan, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-240.

²⁵ Naram, *Choukou op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁷ *ibid.*, Watson, p. 131.

²⁸ Jordan, and Loewe, *979 op. cit.*, p. 208, n. 760.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 215.

party finally managed to escape and resume their journey towards the Yuezhi. After hastening west for twenty or thirty days, they reached the kingdom of Dayuan.³⁰

However 'twenty or thirty days' is simply Watson's more 'poetic' translation of the *Shi Ji*'s actual Chinese text - 'days numbered in the tens' - which thus equates precisely with the *Han Shi*'s description. It is probably more accurate to take this designation to mean 'somewhere less than a hundred', i.e. anything from twenty to ninety days. Thus Zhang Qian travelled from (probably) the northwestern Gansu to the Ferghana Valley (Dayuan) in somewhere between one and three months. Whether his party was actually pursued by its Xiongnu captors is not stated, but if so he was clearly able to avoid recapture by either the Xiongnu or their Wusun allies, who since 133-2 had been in occupation of the Ili Valley. This also sheds some little light on the length of time it might have taken the Yuezhi in their migration from the Gansu to the Ili in the first place, although speed comparisons between a small, fast-moving party in flight and a migrating horde of several hundred thousand are probably useless.

Zhang Qian set out from Xian in 139 (or 138) and was detained for a decade or slightly longer, so that he must have both escaped from the Xiongnu in the Gansu and arrived in Ferghana in either 129 (or 128) BCE. As noted in the previous chapter, the envoy had already been informed by his Xiongnu captors that the Yuezhi had been forced further west by the Wusun during his period of captivity, and set off in 'hot pursuit'. But despite the speed of his journey, by the time Zhang Qian arrived in Ferghana, the Yuezhi had already passed through several years earlier, and continued their journey further to the west.

Events in China: 138 - 129 BCE

While Zhang Qian languished as a prisoner of the Xiongnu for most of the fourth decade of the second century BCE, the relationship between Wudi and the *Shanyu* was deteriorating. The treaty between the two was maintained until 134 BCE, by which time the emperor was twenty-one years of age.

135 BCE:

The Han court debates the Xiongnu 'problem'

In 135, the last year of the Jianyuan era, the Xiongnu approached the Han with an offer to reaffirm the peace alliance, and Wudi referred the question to his ministers for debate. Opinions varied:

'The grand messenger Wang Hui, a native of Yan who had several times served as an official on the northern border and was familiar with the ways of the Xiongnu, stated his opinion: "Although the Han concludes peace treaties with the Xiongnu, it is never more than a couple of years before they violate the agreement. It would be better to refuse their offer and send troops to attack them!"'³¹

Han Anguo, however, replied: "No profit comes to an army that has to fight 1,000 miles from home. The Xiongnu move on the feet of swift warhorses, and in their breasts bear the hearts of beasts. They shift from place to place as fast as a flock of birds, so that it is extremely difficult to corner them and bring them under control. If

³⁰ *Shi Ji*, *Wenjian* p. 242.

³¹ *Shi Ji*, *Wenjian* p. 242.

we march thousands of miles away and try to fight with them, our men and horses will be worn out, and then the wretched will master all their strength and fall upon us... It would not be expedient to attack the Xiongnu. Better to make peace with them.³²

With most of the other ministers siding with Han Anguo, the emperor consented to renew the peace alliance, although this may have gone against his natural inclinations. As Burton Watson has observed, Wudi was a pro-active and energetic ruler for whom inaction and passivity would have been anathema:

The personality of the emperor impresses one first and foremost by its tremendous energy. That the energy was often misdirected, guided by stubbornness and severity, or led astray by blatant charlatanism, we cannot deny. Yet not since the First Emperor of the Qin, whom Emperor Wu at times disturbingly resembles, had China had such a vigorous and strong-willed ruler, nor was it to have another one for many centuries to come.³³

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Wudi had already dispatched Zhang Qian to seek out the Yuezhi, even in the midst of a period of relative peace with the enemy. Nor is it any more surprising that in 134, the first year of the Guanyuan era, and less than twelve months after the debate between his ministers advising peace, the emperor was eager to support a plan, brought to him by the grand messenger Wang Hui, to spring a pre-emptive ambush upon the Xiongnu at Mayi.

134 BCE: *Wudi attempts to ambush the Xiongnu at Mayi*

Here again, as in the case of Gaozu's 200 BCE confrontation with Maodun at Mayi, Sima Qian offers several versions (or 'parallel accounts') of this incident, although the basic plan seems clear enough. Nie Wengyi, an influential and powerful resident of the city of Mayi, argued that with the Xiongnu having been lulled into a sense of passive security by the recently signed peace accord, now was the ideal time to strike at them. Wudi agreed. Nie Wengyi then crossed the border and sought an interview with the *Shanyu*, offering to murder the governor of Mayi and turn the city over to the Xiongnu.

The *Shanyu*, trusting Nie Wengyi, was attracted by his offer and agreed to cooperate. Nie Wengyi returned to Mayi and, putting to death some condemned criminals instead, hung their heads on the city wall as a sign to the *Shanyu*'s envoys that he had carried out his part of the agreement. The *Shanyu* then broke through the border defences and, with a force of over 100,000 cavalry, invaded the empire through the barrier at Wuzhou.³⁴

What Junchen did not know is that the Han had concealed 300,000 infantry, cavalry and bowmen in the valleys around Mayi, lying in wait for the Xiongnu forces. Ironically perhaps, overall command of the force was given to Han Anguo, who only a year ago had been counselling against confrontation with the Xiongnu, while the grand messenger Wang Hui, who had argued for war, was put in charge of the Mayi garrison of 30,000 troops. The Xiongnu broke through the Great Wall and marched on Mayi, but when still some 100 *li* (40 kilometres) from the city the *Shanyu* grew suspicious, 'noticing that there were large numbers of domestic animals in the fields

³² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³³ Watson (1993) *op. cit.*, Intro., p.xiii.

³⁴ *SH* 108, Watson p. 112.

but no people anywhere in sight'.³⁷ Capturing a local official the *Xiongnu* learned of the trap, and quickly retreated to the border. The Han forces set off in pursuit but not with any particular enthusiasm, and indeed Wang Hui and the garrison troops actually refused to cross the border and follow the *Xiongnu* forces into 'barbarian' territory. Both the emperor and Han officials were furious with Wang Hui, and making him a scapegoat for the whole dismal failure, he was condemned to death.³⁸

134-129 BCE: *The Xiongnu resume raids into Han territory, but continue to trade at the border markets.*

As a result of this failed attempt to trap them, the *Xiongnu* immediately broke off friendly relations with the Han and 'began to attack the border defences wherever they happened to be. Time and again they crossed the frontier and carried out innumerable plundering raids'.³⁹ The lure of Han goods was too strong for the *Xiongnu* to resist, however, and the mercantile relationship between them and the Chinese merchants quickly resumed its pre-Mayi state, with representatives of both soon trading freely with each other at border markets all along the Great Wall. (Sima Qian suggests that this was actually part of another Han strategic plan to sap *Xiongnu* resources).⁴⁰ None the less, the *Xiongnu* raids were serious indeed, as the account of one such incursion in 133 indicates: 'The following year the *Xiongnu* crossed the border in great numbers and murdered the governor of Liaoxi. From Liaoxi they advanced to Yanmen, killing and carrying off several thousand men'.⁴¹

129 BCE: *The Han attack the Xiongnu in a four-pronged offensive*

This uneasy situation continued until 129, when Wudi suddenly despatched four generals, each with a force of 10,000 cavalry, to make a surprise attack on the *Xiongnu* at various border market towns.⁴² None of the offensives were particularly successful, however, and two of the commanders were imprisoned upon their return to Xian for their failure. One of them, Li Guang, had only been promoted to General that same year in order to lead the attack against the *Xiongnu* at Yanmen. He was wounded but managed to escape, and then was able to purchase a pardon from Wudi and escape imperial imprisonment into the country, where he lived in retirement for several years.⁴³

129-127 BCE: *The Xiongnu respond, but the Han enjoy a victory*

The *Xiongnu* replied to this failed offensive by launching several plundering expeditions of their own throughout the winter of 129-128. The following autumn (of 128) *Xiongnu* horsemen again breached the Great Wall, murdering the governor of Liaoxi and carrying off 2,000 prisoners.⁴⁴ Wudi responded by dispatching Generals Li Xi from Dai, and Wei Qing from Yunzhong. The latter was able to win for the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁸ See for example SJ 108, Watson pp. 112-114; SJ 109, Watson p. 120, and SJ 110, Watson pp. 148-9 for three parallel accounts of the Mayi incident.

³⁹ SJ 110, Watson p. 149.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ SJ 108, Watson p. 115.

⁴² SJ 116, Watson p. 149.

⁴³ SJ 109, Watson p. 120, SJ 110, Watson pp. 149-50, SJ 111, Watson pp. 164-5.

⁴⁴ SJ 110, Watson p. 150, SJ 111, Watson p. 165.

Han the first substantial victory they had enjoyed over their enemies for at least a decade.

The Wei Qing proceeded west to Longcheng and from there invaded the region south of the bend of the Yellow River as far as Louguan. He captured or killed ~~several~~ ^{thousands} of the enemy, seized 20,000 ^{or 30,000} of their domestic animals, and ~~put to flight~~ ^{defeated} the kings of Baiyang and Loufan tribes, thus making it possible to establish the commandery (province) of Shashang south of the bend of the river. Because of this Wei Qing was ennobled as marquis of Changping with 2,800 households.¹⁴

A parallel account in the *Shi Ji* shows that Wei Qing's campaign was in fact carried out over two successive years. Qing defeated the Xiongnu in 128 (the first year of the new Yanshuo era) and the Loufan and Baiyang barbarians in 127. There may even be a link of some kind between the campaign of Wei Qing against the Xiongnu and allied barbarian tribes in 128/7 and the escape of Zhang Qian from Xiongnu captivity in the Gansu (also possibly in 128, although more probably the year before). The ageing *Shanyu* Junchen, with his ministers and commanders, must have been distracted by this first Han success over their forces in many years, creating conditions that may have facilitated Zhang Qian's escape.

During the course of the next eighteen months or so, Zhang Qian was able to visit Dayuan, Kangju, Daxia and the Da Yuezhi, before commencing his return journey, probably late in 127 or the spring of 126. As will be shown in the next chapter, he was recaptured by the Xiongnu, and may have been forced to spend another decade in captivity had it not been for a fortuitous period of chaos in Xiongnu politics. By the time the Han envoy made good his initial escape from the Xiongnu in (probably) 129, the Yuezhi had already completed their long journey through Ferghana and Sogdia, and established themselves somewhere just to the north of the Amu Darya in northern Bactria.

II

The Yuezhi Migration from the Ili Valley to Ferghana

As a result of their defeat by the Wusun in the Ili Valley in the year 133 or 132, the Yuezhi had been forced to resume their migration westwards. Their route most probably took them through the Ferghana Valley in far eastern Uzbekistan today – the 'Dayuan' of the Chinese sources. This fertile valley subsequently became well known to the Chinese following the mission of Zhang Qian, and it is his description that provides the only textual evidence of the probable passage through the valley by the Yuezhi.

Dayuan

Location: 'The seat of the king's government is at the town of Kueshan¹⁵ and it is distant by 12,250 *li* from Xian ... To the east it is distant by 4031 *li* to the

¹⁴ The name 'Yellow' is not specifically mentioned, but Yellow is certainly what the reference implies. See S. 111, Watson p. 165.

¹⁵ Pulleblank was struck by the similarity between the name of the Dayuan 'capital' Kueshan and Kushan. 'It was the Kushan (Kueizhuang) yabghu of the Yuezhi who was responsible for the founding of the Kushanan empire. It can hardly be sheer coincidence that the capital of ...'

seat of the Protector General, to the north by 15,000 *li* to the borders of Bactria in Kanton, and to the east by 10,000 *li* to the Da Yuezhi. It adjoins Kanton to the north and the Da Yuezhi to the south.⁴⁶

Dayuan lies southwest of the territory of the Xiangnu (near *Yuezhu*), directly west of China. Dayuan is bordered on the north by Kangju, to the west by the kingdom of the Great Yuezhi, on the south by the Da Yuezhi, on the northeast by the land of the Wusun, and on the east by Yumi and Yutian (Khotan).⁴⁷

Ban Gu thus locates Dayuan 12,250 *li* (4900 kilometres) west of Xian, 10,000 *li* (4000 kms) west of the borders of Han China, 1500 *li* (604 kms) south (more properly east) of Sogdia, and 690 *li* (276 kms) northeast of the 'principal town' of the Yuezhi (north of the Amu Darya – see Chapter Five). Sima Qian adds that to the north of Dayuan (more properly west or northwest) was the state of Kangju (Sogdia); to the west the 'principal city' of the Yuezhi; to the south west Daxia (soon to be conquered by the Yuezhi and made part of their realm); to the northeast the land of the Wusun, and (far) to the (south) east Yumi and Yutian (Khotan).

Dayuan can only convincingly be identified with the Ferghana Valley, although there remains some disagreement regarding the actual extent of Dayuan. Pulleyblank improbably interpreted the *Shi Ji* reference in particular as indicating that Dayuan should be located perhaps 'somewhere in the region of Kucha' in the northern Tarim Basin, or alternatively that 'the description of Dayuan in the *Shi Ji* as a populous land of many cities is much more consistent with Sogdiana proper than with Ferghana'.⁴⁸ However the Chinese sources specifically describe Kucha as a separate political entity,⁴⁹ whilst most of Sogdia was actually part of the realm of the Kangju dynasty throughout much of the second and first centuries BCE (as will be shown below), and southern Sogdia/northern Bactria was occupied by the Yuezhi from 130. Herzfeld thought that Dayuan was in the Pamirs,⁵⁰ a view with which Tarn partly concurred,⁵¹ whereas Narain has more realistically suggested that 'greater Dayuan' may well have extended from the Ferghana Valley up into the Pamirs:⁵²

'Probably Dayuan was what may be called a greater Ferghana, perhaps extending up the river valleys to the Pamir watershed. This extension would make sense of the eastern boundary description in relation to Yumi and Yutian given in the *Shi Ji*'.⁵³

The fact that Dayuan is also described as bordering the Yuezhi in the west is intriguing, indicating perhaps that the Yuezhi realm (or at least sphere of control) had

called Kushan in the *Han Shi*', in Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 26. Pulleyblank identified the 'city' with Kushan (west of Samarkand), but this is unsupportable. Hermann preferred to place Kushan in the Ferghana Valley, in A. Hermann, *Historical and Commercial Atlas of China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935) map 24, square C2, a location more in keeping with the evidence of the Han annals.

⁴⁶ HS 96A 17B.

⁴⁷ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁴⁸ Pulleyblank (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ HS 96B 9B. The state of Zhiutzui: 'It is usually identified with present day Kucha'. Hulsewé and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 163 n. 506. See I in Mantsai, *Katscha und seine Beziehungen zu China vom 2. Jh. v. bis zum 6. Jh. n. Chr.* (Asiatische Forschungen Vol 27, Göttingen 1969).

⁵⁰ F. Herzfeld, 'Sakastan', in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (1932) iv (5), pp. 22 ff.

⁵¹ Tarn (1938) *op. cit.*, pp. 476-70.

⁵² Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

rapidly attained a considerable size once they had settled to the north of the *Amu Darya* in 130. Alternatively it might also be interpreted as implying that, for all intents and purposes, considerable portions of southern Kangju-Sogdiana were also regarded as part of the Yuezhi realm by the Han chroniclers. As for the location of Dayuan, however, there can surely be no doubt that its political and cultural heart was the Ferghana Valley.

Population/Size Households 60,000 Individuals 300,000.⁵⁴

'Dayuan, as well as Daxia (Bactria) and Anxi (Parthia) were all large states'.⁵⁵

'The population numbers several hundred thousand'.⁵⁶

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms: 60,000.⁵⁷

'The people fight with bows and spears and can shoot from horseback'.⁵⁸

'... however their forces were weak ...'.⁵⁹

Dayuan was thus a large and populous state with a substantial military capacity, and yet the Han were apparently unimpressed by the Dayuan's fighting prowess. The final comment above is found in Ban Gu's account of the report of Zhang Qian, which informed Wudi that the kingdom was militarily ineffective. Later Han envoys (including Yao Dinghan in 104 BCE) also claimed that Dayuan was weak, and suggested optimistically that 'it would not require a force of more than 3,000 Han soldiers equipped with powerful crossbows to conquer it and take the entire population captive'.⁶⁰ Ultimately however, the Han (who came to covet Dayuan's 'heavenly horses') were never able to completely subjugate the Ferghanese, despite the efforts of General Li Guangli late in the second century BCE, who successfully besieged their capital city and returned to China with a substantial herd of the horses. Although something of a military debacle initially, this was none the less a considerable achievement by the Chinese, given the great distance separating Xian from Dayuan.⁶¹ None of this suggests that the Dayuans were militarily weak however, and Zhang Qian and Yao Dinghan may simply have been giving Wudi the information they assumed he wanted to hear, rather than providing an accurate estimation of Dayuan's military preparedness. On the other hand, the fact that the Yuezhi seem to have passed through (and perhaps even briefly settled in) the Ferghana Valley does indicate either that the Dayuan forces were no match for a determined nomadic horde, or more probably that they chose diplomacy over confrontation.

⁵⁴ HS 96A 17B.

⁵⁵ HS 61 3A.

⁵⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁵⁷ HS 96A 17B.

⁵⁸ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁵⁹ HS 61 3A.

⁶⁰ SJ 123, Watson p. 246.

⁶¹ HS 61 9A 10B, SJ 123, Watson pp. 249-50.

Urbanisation: 'The people live in houses in fortified cities, there being some seventy or more cities of various sizes in the region'.⁶²

The individual settlements of Dayuan amount to more than 70 towns.⁶³

'Inside the (Dayuan) city of Yon there were no wells, and the inhabitants drew what they needed from water that flowed outside the walls. The city was well fortified with both outer and inner walls'.⁶⁴

The urban settlements of Dayuan were clearly substantial in number (over seventy) and well fortified (with both inner and outer walls, able to withstand a siege of up to forty days). Furthermore, the individual houses within the settlements were also fortified. This was a 'state' geared towards defence, as would be expected of a sedentary 'people' occupying such a strategic and well-travelled trade and migrational route.

Environment/Lifeways:

'The land, climate, types of goods and popular way of life are identical with those of the Da Yuezhi and Anxi. In Dayuan and to its left and right (ie. east and west) grapes are used to make wine. Rich people store up to ten thousand *shih* or more, and in cases when it is kept for a long period it may last for several decades without being spoilt. The general custom is to enjoy wine, and the horses enjoy lucerne'.⁶⁵

'The people are settled on the land, plowing the fields and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes'.⁶⁶

'There are many fine horses. The horses sweat blood'⁶⁷ and it is said that their progenitors were descended from the Heavenly Horses'.⁶⁸

'The region has many fine horses which sweat blood, their forbears are supposed to have been foaled from heavenly horses'.⁶⁹

The four-year expedition of Li Guangli to capture some of the 'Heavenly Horses' touched upon above is well described in both the sources.⁷⁰ The accounts, although fascinating and indicative of both Han imperialism under Wudi and of the ability and preparedness of the Chinese to carry out extensive military operations over great distances, do not directly relate to the Yuezhi and their relationship with neighbouring states. Of more relevance is a consideration of an implied 'similarity of lifeway' (and language?) between the Dayuans, Parthians and even the Yuezhi, and the more specific question of Dayuan ethnicity.

⁶² SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁶³ HS 96A 17B.

⁶⁴ HS 61 10B; SJ 123, Watson pp. 248-9.

⁶⁵ HS 96A 17B.

⁶⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁶⁷ The 'bloody' sweat of the heavenly horses was probably the result of infestation by micro-parasites which caused small, bleeding sores in the horses' hides.

⁶⁸ HS 96A 17B.

⁶⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

⁷⁰ HS 61 9A-12B; SJ 123, Watson pp. 246-252.

Ethnicity and Extent of 'Greater' Dayuan

Clearly Dayuan was a large, relatively powerful and well defended *sedentary* urbanised society dependent on agriculture (particularly viticulture) with a similar lifeway and economy to Anxi Parthia. With its seventy fortified towns and *liu*, it appears to have been a self-contained, territorial and geographical state which it differed markedly from the territories of the nomadising Wusun and Xiongnu. However, Naram questions whether Dayuan was indeed

... the name of a *territorial state* or merely the *ethnic name* of a people? Or was it both? Did the Dayuan people, or the people who lived in Dayuan, speak Tokharian, or were they related to the Tokharian-speaking Yuezhi? Or were they an altogether non-Tokharian, but Sakan- or Iranian-speaking, Indo-European people?⁷¹

Pulleyblank also wondered whether the Dayuans might be Indo-Europeans, or even Tocharian speakers.⁷² Naram argues that the reason the Yuezhi apparently had little trouble in passing through Dayuan was 'partly because of a congenial ethno-linguistic as well as cultural environment'.⁷³ Whilst the Han sources do indeed comment upon a similarity of lifestyle between the Dayuans and the Da Yuezhi (post-130), the closer and more substantial similarities noted in the texts between the Ferghanese and the Parthians is surely more compelling evidence that the Dayuans were essentially of Indo-Iranian descent. Pionkov, on the other hand, is convinced that a substantial percentage of the inhabitants of the Ferghana Valley were Amyrgian Sakas who were actually displaced by the migrating Yuezhi.⁷⁴ One thus needs to differentiate between an indigenous Dayuan population (of undetermined although probably Indo-Iranian ethnicity) and the Indo-Iranian-speaking Sakan inhabitants.

These apparent similarities in language, customs and appearance between the Ferghanese, the Parthians and other 'states' and peoples in between each are noted in both the Han histories:

'To the west of Yuan and as far as the state of Anxi there are many different languages spoken, but they are in general the same, and people understand each other clearly. The inhabitants of the area all have deep-set eyes, and many wear moustaches and beards. They are expert traders, haggling over fractions of a *shu*'.⁷⁵ They hold the women in honour, and what the women say the men act upon'.⁷⁶

'Although the states from Dayuan west to Anxi speak rather different languages, their customs are generally similar and their languages mutually intelligible. The men all have deep-set eyes and profuse beards and whiskers. They are skilful at commerce and will haggle over a fraction of a cent. Women are held in great respect, and the men make decisions on the advice of their women'.⁷⁷

Tarn believed that the languages were 'Iranian': 'Most of the Daxians wore beards; and from Ferghana to Parthia, though the dialects differed, the people could

⁷¹ Naram (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁷² Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁷³ Naram (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Pionkov (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁷⁵ A *shu* is the smallest Han unit of weight, equal to 0.64 gms.

⁷⁶ HS 96A 181b.

⁷⁷ ST 123 Watson p. 245.

understand each other (the beards and language are Iranian).⁸⁰ He was also intrigued by observations on the elevated status and role of women in the region, concluding that:

All it means, I think, is that he (Zhang Qian) had heard of some local phenomenon, one that has been common at many periods and in many lands, probably no racial deductions can be drawn from it, but it might very possibly be a pre-Iranian survival.⁸¹

As implied above, Tarn was firmly convinced that the majority of the inhabitants between the Ferghana Valley and Parthia (i.e. Sogdiana and Bactria in particular) were essentially of 'Indo-Iranian' ethnicity, which may have included elements of both the semi-nomadic Amyrgian Sakan and the sedentary agriculturists of the fertile valleys. There is no real evidence to suggest that the residents of Dayuan (Indo-Iranian-speakers) and the migrating Yuezhi horde (Indo-European Tocharian-speakers) were culturally or linguistically related, as Naram suggests. But the Chinese sources do undeniably hint at such a connection. As noted above, the *Han Shu* specifically states that: 'The land, climate, types of goods and popular way of life are identical with those of the Da Yuezhi and Anxi'.⁸² Elsewhere, when describing the state of the Da Yuezhi, it notes: 'The land, climate, type of goods, popular way of life and coinage are identical with those of Anxi'.⁸³

This comment upon a shared lifeway might possibly refer to a commonality of lifestyle between the 'Indo-Iranian-speaking' Ferghanese and Parthians, and the 'native' (also Indo-Iranian-speaking?) residents of Bactria, rather than to the Indo-European-speaking Da Yuezhi, the conquerors and eventual occupiers of Bactria. More probably, however, given the later compositional date of the *Han Shu*, this reference suggests that even most of the previously nomadic elements of the Yuezhi confederation had abandoned their ancestral nomadic way of life upon occupying Bactria, and adopted a semi-sedentary lifeway similar to that which other members of the Yuezhi confederation had undoubtedly followed in the Gansu and Ili, and to that clearly followed by the sedentary populations of Ferghana and Parthia.

The comment in the *Han Shu* must date to the later revision of the text, based on reports submitted by the Office of the Protector General some time after 59 BCE (or even as late as 75 CE by Ban Chao) describing the Yuezhi during the five-yabghu (or even later early-Kushan) period, particularly as the earlier *Shi Ji* (supposedly quoting Zhang Qian's actual account) claimed that at that time the Yuezhi were still 'a nation of nomads'.⁸⁴ The obvious conclusion is that by c. 129-128 BCE (when Zhang Qian caught up with them) the Yuezhi had only recently settled north of the Oxus, and substantial portions of the confederation were still essentially nomadic. Over the ensuing decades they gradually abandoned nomadism completely, and adopted a sedentary, urbanised lifeway by the middle- to late-first century BCE, a conclusion supported by textual, numismatic and archaeological evidence. Naram agrees that

⁸⁰ See Tarn (1938) *op. cit.* p. 298.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* pp. 298-9. See also M. Rostovtzeff, *Cambridge Ancient History* XI (1936) p. 92, who argued that the role played by women in the social and political life of the 'half-Iranian' Sarmatian tribes of the region had its origins in a pre-Iranian 'Maeotian element'.

⁸² HS 96A 17B.

⁸³ HS 96A 14B.

⁸⁴ SJ 121. Watson p234.

discrepancies between the *Han Shu* (which notes a commonality of lifestyle between the Dayuans, Parthians and Yuezhi) and the *Shi Ji* (which differentiates between Ferghanese Parthians and the Yuezhi) can be explained by the different composition dates of the two Chinese histories.

But this apparent discrepancy in the two accounts is easily resolved when we note the difference of more than a hundred years in their composition. During this period things did change in the Oxus Valley, not only politically but also culturally. Dayuan had already been conquered by the Da Yuezhi and the latter had moved south of the Oxus. The power and territory of the Yuezhi were much enlarged. Culturally and socially the Yuezhi had come closer to the people around them by marriage and adopting local customs.⁸³

The Passage through Dayuan by the Da Yuezhi

Neither of the Chinese sources categorically state that the Yuezhi passed through the Ferghana Valley, but the inference is very clearly that they did. The chronology is straightforward enough:

133/2 BCE: *The Yuezhi are expelled from the Ili Valley and continue to migrate westwards*

The *Han Shu* states that the Yuezhi were forced further westwards in their migration following their expulsion from the Ili Valley by the Wusun, in passages already referred to in the previous chapter: 'Later when the *Kimmo* of Wusun attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi, the Da Yuezhi migrated to the west and subjugated Daxia'.⁸⁴ Also, in the 'Account of Zhang Qian': 'Going west he (the *Kimmo*) attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi, who again fled west, moving into the lands of Daxia'.⁸⁵

There were only two practical route options available to the Yuezhi from the Ili Valley in their trek westwards.⁸⁶ The more northerly led from Almaty in southern present-day Kazakhstan to Biskek in northern Kyrgyzstan, then west to Taraz (back in Kazakhstan), southwest through Tashkent and Samarkand and finally southeast towards Termez (all in Uzbekistan). More probably, however, their route was through Almaty and Biskek, then southwest (perhaps turning south at present-day Kara-Baly) to the Ferghana Valley in eastern Uzbekistan. The path from Kara-Baly would have taken the Yuezhi horde south across the 3586 metre Tus-Asuu, and 3186 metre Ala-Bell Passes (or nearby ancient equivalents), then along the banks of the Naryn and across the Syr Darya into Ferghana. From Ferghana their route would have taken the Yuezhi through present-day Kukon and Changand, then west to Samarkand either directly through Zizzach or south over the 3378 metre Sahrstan Pass into the valley of the Zaravshan.

That the initial part of the march was through the Ferghana Valley/Dayuan is clearly implied in the *Han Shu* comment that the Yuezhi 'thereupon went far away, passing

⁸³ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁸⁴ HS 96B 1B.

⁸⁵ HS 61 5A.

⁸⁶ However see also Torday *op. cit.*, pp. 253-4, and R. Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkistan* (London 1903) p. 260, for descriptions of an alternative high trail from Ysyk Kul to the oases of the Ferghana Valley, used by traditional Kirghiz traders on their way to markets in Ferghana.

Dayuan and proceeding west to subjugate Daxia.⁸⁷ Why would Han Gu make any mention of Dayuan at all in relation to the Da Yuezhi's itinerary if the Yuezhi had followed a far more northerly route to the west, bypassing Dayuan completely? Sima Qian also names Dayuan in relation to the migration of the Da Yuezhi, and although there is also no specific indication in the *Shi Ji* that they necessarily passed through Ferghana, the implication again is surely that they did.⁸⁸ After they were defeated by the Xiongnu, they moved far to the west, beyond Dayuan, where they attacked and conquered the people of Daxia.⁸⁹ The probability that the second stage of the Yuezhi's migration took them through Ferghana is strengthened by the reception given to Zhang Qian when he arrived in Dayuan some five or so years later.

The Mission of Zhang Qian – Stage Two

128/127 BCE: *Zhang Qian also passes through Ferghana*

... after speeding westwards for days numbered by the ten he (Zhang Qian) reached Dayuan. Dayuan had heard of Han's abundant wealth and had wished to establish contact, but had not been able to do so. (The king of Dayuan) was delighted when he received Qian and asked him where he was going. (Zhang) Qian said: "I was going on a mission to the Yuezhi for Han and my way was blocked by the Xiongnu. Now that I have escaped it rests with you to send someone to guide me on my way, if I do actually succeed in reaching my destination and returning to Han, the wealth and goods which Han will present to you will beggar description." Dayuan believed this, and sent off (Zhang) Qian, providing him with interpreters and guides. He reached Kangju who passed him on to the Da Yuezhi.⁹⁰

Or as Watson's translation of Sima Qian puts it:

"After hastening west for twenty or thirty days they reached the kingdom of Dayuan. The king of Dayuan had heard of the wealth of the Han Empire and wished to establish communication with it, though as yet he had been unable to do so. When he met Zhang Qian he was overjoyed and asked where Zhang Qian wished to go. "I was dispatched as envoy of the Han to the Yuezhi, but the Xiongnu blocked my way and I have only just now managed to escape", he replied. "I beg your highness to give me some guides to show me the way. If I can reach my destination and return to Han to make my report, the Han will reward you with countless gifts." The king of Dayuan trusted his words and sent him on his way, giving him guides and interpreters to take him to the state of Kangju. From there he was able to make his way to the land of the Great Yuezhi".⁹⁰

These references contain much of interest. Firstly, one should not necessarily take too seriously the claim that the king of Dayuan had heard of the wealth of the Han Empire, and had been attempting to establish contact (although neither suggestion is out of the question). His comments perhaps belong to the same category of report as the claim that Han could easily defeat Dayuan. Despite his extraordinary stamina and perseverance, Zhang Qian was ultimately unsuccessful in the principal mission bestowed upon him by Wudi, and on his return to Xian had to inform the emperor that he had failed to persuade the Yuezhi to enter into any sort of alliance against the Xiongnu. Given Wudi's reputation, Zhang Qian may have thought it prudent to give

⁸⁷ HS 96A 15A.

⁸⁸ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

⁸⁹ HS 61 2A.

⁹⁰ SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

his emperor as much positive news from the expedition as possible. By implying that the large, sedentary state of Dayuan, so far from China, was well aware of the power and glory of the Han (under Wudi), that they possessed the astonishing 'heavenly horses' (which so beguiled the emperor) and that they would be easy to defeat militarily, Zhang Qian was easily able to distract Wudi from any disappointment he may have felt over the failure of his mission by the news of exotic states just waiting to either enter a mercantile relationship with the Han, or be conquered by them and included in an expansionist Han Empire. This is diplomatic psychology on Zhang Qian's part. It is quite possible, in fact, that the king of Dayuan had heard very little of the Han. And if he had, that information may have been passed on to him by the migrating Yuezhi, additional evidence of their passage through Ferghana.

Clearly the king of Dayuan had not only heard of the Yuezhi, but also knew exactly where they had gone. The fact that he provided guides and interpreters to lead Zhang Qian's party through into Kangju suggests that he knew that this was the same route (or at least the same direction) that the Yuezhi horde had followed some years earlier. It is far less likely that the Dayuans would have had such precise knowledge of the route and whereabouts of the Yuezhi if the latter had followed the alternative more northerly migration route along the southern edge of the Mojynkum Desert. Narain is contradictory in his assessment of the 'geography' of this stage of the Yuezhi migration. On one hand he apparently does not believe that the Yuezhi actually passed through Dayuan, arguing that they probably took a more northerly route,²¹ but on the other claims that 'perhaps they had an unobstructed passage if they really passed through their (the Dayuan's) territory'.²² If they did indeed pass through Ferghana, as this book maintains, then we must agree with Narain that there is no evidence of conflict between the migrants and the sedentary Dayuans (apart from the suggestion by Piankov that the Yuezhi may have displaced Amyrgian Sakan tribes from the valley, considered above).

As noted above, Narain claims that the Dayuans and Yuezhi were 'evidently on good terms and in communication with one another',²³ arguing that the lack of references to any conflict between the Yuezhi and Dayuans, plus the Dayuan king's obvious knowledge of the Yuezhi's location, is evidence of a common ethnicity.²⁴ Yet the fact that the Yuezhi seem to have passed through Dayuan without the need for any serious military conflict might alternatively indicate the obvious military superiority of the migrating horde, and therefore reflect a wise decision taken by the Dayuan king to allow them safe passage. The majority of Dayuans may have remained safely locked up in their walled and defensible cities as the migrating horde passed by. Given Li Guang's experience of needing forty days to besiege the Dayuan's 'capital city' three decades later, it may well be that the Yuezhi also thought it more prudent to simply keep moving until they found an area in which they could settle, rather than attempt to conquer militarily the native population and its ruling dynasty, which obviously held a strong defensive position. Archaeological evidence considered below hints at the possibility that the Yuezhi may even have rested in the remote southwestern corner of Ferghana, either with the Dayuan king's blessing or because the latter simply had no say in the matter. Rather than providing evidence of a

²¹ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7, n. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

common or congenial ethnicity then, the relative ease of the Yuezhi's passage through (and even temporary residence in) Dayuan might be simply another example of a different common theme in Inner Asian geopolitics – the greater military power of pastoral/nomadic states over semi-sedentary, irrigation-based city-state – a state of the relative size of their forces.

What would ideally be available is archaeological evidence of the passage of the Yuezhi through Dayuan to provide material support for the textual references, and here again it is the work of Soviet and Russian researchers over several decades that offers the only hope of such material evidence.

Archaeological Evidence of the Passage of the Yuezhi through Ferghana

The Ferghana valley proper is some 300 kilometres long and includes – in addition to extensive fertile pastures, deserts and mountains where agriculture is not possible. Indeed mountains surround the valley on all sides – the Cōtkol (Chaktāh) Range to the northwest, the Fergana Range to the east, the Alay (Alay) Range to the southeast and the Tūrkestan Ranges to the southwest. With the exception of large numbers of stone tools of the Upper Paleolithic Era found in the valleys of the River Ōkhna during the early 1950s, the great majority of archaeological discoveries from Ferghana date to the Bronze and Iron Ages. These latter finds have yielded a substantial number of pottery fragments, but few other material remains. Prominent amongst Soviet and Russian archaeologists active in the Ferghana Valley have been Latymir, Sprishevskiy, Bernshtram and Zadneprovskiy. They have shown that examples of each of the three broad types of funerary structures noted in the previous chapters are to be found in the Ferghana Valley, which has made the task of specific identification and attribution all the more difficult.¹⁵

Ground-level burial structures (in brick and stone) have been dated to a later period, and are therefore outside the possible chronology of Yuezhi migration. A very few catacombs have also been discovered, generally of the type where the dromos is continued, stretching in a north-south direction. Gorbunova believes that 'this variety is (also) characteristic of the Middle Amu Darya and Zerafshan areas'.¹⁶ Podboy tombs of sub-type B (where the side chamber in the long wall of the shaft is located in the north or south wall), dated to within the general time frame of Yuezhi migration, have also been found in Ferghana, Sogdiana and northeastern Bactria. In fact, in addition to being discovered in the Ferghana Valley, they are 'more frequent in the basins of the Amu Darya, Zerafshan and Middle Syr Darya',¹⁷ 'all contiguous areas where one would not be surprised to find concentrations of Yuezhi tombs'. This lends tentative further support to that argument that podboy structures, particularly those aligned north and south, should be considered potential candidates for identification as Yuezhi funerary structures.

Zadneprovskiy first proposed this theory, not without initial reservations, at the 1968 International Conference on the Kushans at Dushanbe, suggesting that 'it is extremely

¹⁵ For a comprehensive overview of the history of archaeological research in Ferghana, see Gorbunova (1980) *op. cit.*, pp. 100-111, 113-165, and G. Frankel, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia* (Leiden 1970) pp. 42 ff.

¹⁶ Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

likely that the monuments of Southern Ferghana and Alay, such as Karabulak, also belong to the Yuezhi, although the possibility is not excluded that they contain some local variant.⁹⁷ Zadneprovsky has consistently maintained this original attribution, noting more recently that podboy burials from southern Tajikistan and northern Kirgizia attributed to the Yuezhi by Mandel'shtam⁹⁸ were similar to 'burials in podboys of Semirechie, Fergana and Bukhara oasis', and that all 'belonged to the Yueh-chih'.⁹⁹ In particular Zadneprovsky has noted a close similarity between the podboy tombs unearthed at the Chawuhugou III site in the northern Larin Basin (see Chapter Two), podboys discovered in the Ysyi Kul region (the 'Semirechie', as noted in Chapter Three) and similar monuments found in the Ferghana Valley:

'In many features, i.e. location of the niche – podboy in the northern wall of the grave, latitudinal orientation of the skeleton, bricking up of the entrance to the podboy with raw brick, they, the Chawuhugou III tombs resemble the monuments of Semirechie and the neighbouring Fergana regions' (My italics).¹⁰⁰

The similarity is most obvious if one compares the plans and sections of Chawuhugou III with those of the Khangiz burial grounds in Ferghana. By 1999 Zadneprovsky had recorded and studied 80 different burial sites in the Ferghana Valley, with almost 2000 excavated burial mounds (although the details of only a very few have so far been published). Single podboy burials have been found in the northern and eastern parts of the valley, but most have been located in the west and southwest. Gorbunova has also claimed that in the immediate pre-Kushan period, the western regions of the Ferghana Valley are distinctly different archaeologically from the central and eastern regions (which resemble each other more closely in terms of funerary structures and the grave goods they contained):

'It appears that the migration of the tribes (Yuezhi) had a definite effect on Ferghana, primarily on its Western Districts, which were more accessible for a penetration into the Valley, and less developed in former periods'.¹⁰²

Specifically, the majority of podboys so far discovered are concentrated in the Lyail'yaka-Isfara-Sokha interfluvium of southwestern Ferghana (in the southeastern corner of Kyrgyzstan) where over 300 podboy burials have been located, representing some 75% of the total number studied in Ferghana. Although originally attributed to the separate Karabulak culture by Baruzdin in 1960, Zadneprovsky has urged their re-attribution to the migrating Yuezhi on the basis of their similarity to other podboy sites also tentatively attributable to the Yuezhi.¹⁰³ This means that three Soviet/Russian archaeologists (Mandel'shtam, Gorbunova and Zadneprovsky) have each

⁹⁷ V.A. Zadneprovsky, 'History of Central Asian Nomads in the Kushan Period', in B. Gafurov, M. Asimov, G.M. Bongard-Levin, B.Y. Stavisky, B.A. Litvinsky et al, eds. *Kushan Studies in U.S.S.R. Papers Presented by the Soviet Scholars at the UNESCO Conference on History, Archaeology, and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan Period, Dushanbe 1968* (Soviet Indology Series No. 3 - Indian Studies Past and Present, Calcutta 1970) p. 148.

⁹⁸ See for example Mandel'shtam (1974) *op. cit.* This paper is summarised in English in *Kushan Studies in U.S.S.R. ibid.* pp. 165-6.

⁹⁹ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ N.G. Gorbunova, 'Ferghana in the Time of the Kushan Kingdom - The Question of its Borders', in *Kushan Studies in U.S.S.R. op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹⁰² Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

argued that the Ferghana podboys provide material 'evidence' of the Yuezhi's presence in (and hence passage through) the Ferghana Valley.

In addition, the concentration of some 300 podboy burials in a small area of the valley, suggests that, if they were attributable to the Yuezhi, the latter must have temporarily occupied the fertile (although 'less developed') region delimited by the Lyalyaka, Sokha and Isfara Rivers in far southwestern Ferghana. Their residency must only have been brief, limited perhaps to the winter of 133-2 or 132-1 BCE. Although 300 tombs sound like a substantial number, for a migrating horde of some 300,000 people or more it represents only a very small percentage of the total. These tombs have also revealed a range of material goods and artifacts, which will be considered in relation to similar discoveries in Sogdian tombs below.

III

The Migration of the Yuezhi through Sogdia

Introduction

If one accepts that the migrating Yuezhi probably passed through Ferghana in 133 or 132, then there is an equally persuasive argument that their subsequent route was through Kangju, a 'state' in the Han texts that is surely to be identified with ancient Sogdia. Here again they were followed through the region, some four or five years later, by Zhang Qian, who was led there by guides and interpreters provided for him by the king of Dayuan, as noted above. It is references to Kangju in the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* (and by Ptolemy), as well as the discoveries of Soviet and Russian archaeologists, that provide evidence outlining the role of Kangju in both the migration of the Yuezhi and the mission of Zhang Qian.

Chinese Textual Evidence for Kangju

Location: 'The seat of the king's government in winter is in Leyuendi . . . to the town of Beman. It is distant by 12,000 *li* from Xian. One reaches Leyuendi after a journey of seven days on horseback, and it is a distance of 9,104 *li* within the realm to the king's summer residence. To the east it is a distance of 5,500 *li* to the Seat of the Protector General'.¹⁰⁴

'It is said: "Some 2000 *li* to the northwest from Kangju is the state of Yancui. The trained bowmen number 100,000. It has the same way of life as Kangju. It is situated on the Great Marsh, which has no further shore and which is presumably the Northern Sea'.¹⁰⁵

'Kangju is situated some 2,000 *li* northwest of Dayuan. The country is small and borders Dayuan. It acknowledges nominal sovereignty to the Yuezhi people in the south and the Xiongnu in the east'.¹⁰⁶

'(Wusun) adjoins . . . Kangju in the northwest'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ HS 96A:151.

¹⁰⁵ HS 96A:17X.

¹⁰⁶ HS 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁰⁷ HS 96B:118.

(The State of Wu) and (1000 li to the west) to the capital of the state of Kangju.¹¹⁵

Attempts by scholars over several centuries to geographically locate and identify Kangju have not been helped by textual corruption in both the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji*. And yet, although several words and even whole sentences are missing, the information provided is still in the same order as that for the other 'western states', so that any gaps cannot be substantial. Certainly the distances between Xian and Beitian are not quite reconciled, and the distance from Beitian and the king's summer capital (9104 *li* or 3641 kms) is surely corrupt. Hulsewe and Loewe suggest that the text may originally have read 'ninety one *li*' for 36 kilometres, although this seems too low,¹¹⁶ while Pelliot noted Wang Kuowei's suggestion of 1104 *li* (441 kms)¹¹⁷ which is a more viable figure within a country described as 'small'. The identities of both Beitian and (Leiyuenitidu) are almost impossible to determine, however. Wang Kuowei identified the former (impossibly) with Ysyk Kul,¹¹⁸ while Pulleyblank has argued that the latter might 'represent some form of the name Jaxartes'.¹¹⁹ The distance between Beitian and (Leiyuenitidu) is described as 'seven days on horseback' in the *Han Shu*, which Hulsewe and Loewe suggest equals about 500 *li* – i.e. marches of seventy *li* or 28 kilometres per day through the mountainous country of the region.¹²⁰ The identification of these two principal settlements with Samarkand and Bukhara is one obvious possibility, although the distance between the two cities by road is about 200 or so kilometres which does not reconcile with any of the given statistics.

Pulleyblank discusses the possible Tokharian philological origin of the name 'Kangju', in his reconstruction of 'Old Chinese' **khan-kiah*. In the Tokharian vocabulary (Tokharian 1A) there is the word *kank*, which means 'stone'. Thus Kangju could mean the 'Stone Country', i.e. Samarkand (or equally Tashkent as 'Stone City').¹²¹ Naram offers a precise location for Kangju, although somewhat surprisingly does not allow for the inclusion of any lands south of the Syr Darya, thus excluding the entire Zeravshan Valley, the cultural heart and population centre of Sogdia:

'The dividing line between the Kangju and the Da Yuezhi was provided by the Syr Darya in its middle bend with its centre point near Leninabad. The state of Kangju was smaller than that of the Da Yuezhi. Probably it included the area north of the Syr Darya and west of the Kuraminskiye Satkalaskye (Piskun and Chikoi) mountain ranges, the lands watered by the rivers Angren, Chirchik and Keles, all tributaries of the Syr Darya between Tashkent and Angren. In short, the Kangju state comprised the northeastern wedge of modern Uzbekistan into Kirghiziya and Kazakhstan, the eastern part of this wedge formed part of Dayuan'.¹²²

Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Hulsewe and Loewe, *op. cit.*, p. 125, n. 299, 2.

¹¹⁶ P. Pelliot, 'L'Édition collective des œuvres de Wang Kouo-wei', in *T'oung Pao* 26 (1929) p. 151.

¹¹⁷ See *Ibid.* p. 150.

¹¹⁸ Pulleyblank (1962) *op. cit.*, p. 94, see also Torday *op. cit.*, p. 319 n. 34 for a detailed discussion of the philological link between Kangju and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya).

¹¹⁹ Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 125, n. 299, 2.

¹²⁰ Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹²¹ Naram (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

Narain's geographical location seems too far to the north. Surely, despite some text corruption and the uncertainty of its philological antecedents, the information provided by the texts is sufficient to allow for the identification of the 'state' of Kangju as ancient Sogdiana. Kangju is clearly to the north of the Amu Darya and the Yuezhi's principal city of Jianshi (see Chapter Five), to the west and northwest of the Ferghana Valley (where it also apparently adjoined the clearly very substantial post-132 realm of the Wusun); and southeast of the western realms of the Xiongnu (which must therefore have included the steppes of Kazakhstan). Kangju incorporated lands on either side of the middle Syr Darya, particularly the densely occupied Zhetysay Valley south of the Syr Darya, and must surely have included Samarkand and Bukhara (as Shishkina also argues below). Hence, according to the textual evidence at least, Kangju can only be convincingly identified with the general geographical outline of Sogdiana.

Population Size: Households 120,000 Individuals 600,000.¹¹⁶

'The country is small'.¹¹⁷

The physical dimensions of the Kangju realm may not have been vast, but the population was substantial, which allowed the ruling dynasty to maintain a formidable military force.

Military Strength: Persons able to bear arms. 120,000.¹¹⁸

'They have 80,000 or 90,000 skilled archer warriors'.¹¹⁹

'... (it) is not subject to the Protector General'.¹²⁰

'In the east (the inhabitants) were constrained to serve the Xiongnu'.¹²¹

'It acknowledges nominal sovereignty to (Zurcher translates as 'it is subservient to')¹²² the Yuezhi people in the south and the Xiongnu in the east'.¹²³

'However, Kangju felt that it was separated (from Han) by a long distance, and alone in its arrogance it was not willing to be considered on the same terms as the various other states'.¹²⁴

'(Wudi) heard that (to the north, there were (people or places) such as the Da Yuezhi and Kangju, whose forces were strong, it would be

¹¹⁶ HS 96A 15B.

¹¹⁷ ST 123, Watson p. 234.

¹¹⁸ HS 96A 15B.

¹¹⁹ ST 123, Watson p. 234.

¹²⁰ HS 96A 15B.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Zurcher (1968) *op. cit.*, p. 360.

¹²³ ST 123, Watson p. 234.

¹²⁴ HS 96A 16A.

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¹¹⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹²⁰ HS 96A 15B.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Zurcher (1968) *op. cit.*, p. 360.

¹²³ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹²⁴ HS 96A 16A.

possible to present them with gifts and hold out advantage with which to bring them to court.

Unlike Zhang Qian's (and two decades later Yao Dinghan's) dismissal of the military prowess of Dayuan, the Chinese were clearly more impressed by the strength of Kangju, finding them arrogant and militarily self-confident. There is no suggestion here that this state could be conquered by a force of only 3,000 Han warriors, but rather an admission that the forces of Kangju (with 120,000 armed men, 80,000-90,000 of which were skilled and presumably mounted archers) were strong, and would not easily be defeated by the Han. Presumably the ruling Kangju dynasty and its pastoralist allies provided the bulk of the mounted archer warriors, while the sedentised agriculturists of the river valleys could be relied upon to provide the remainder. Eschewing any military option then, Zhang Qian argued instead (in his report to Wudi) that Kangju could be persuaded by Han gifts and favours to consider becoming subjects (or at least allies) of the Chinese. In short, Kangju was powerful and remote enough to resist Han attempts to join their tributary confederacy by military means, but was clearly under some sort of sovereignty obligation to both the Yuezhi and the Xiongnu.

Environment/Lifeways:

'The way of life is identical with that of the Da Yuezhi'.¹²⁶

'Its people likewise are nomads and resemble the Yuezhi in their customs'.¹²⁷

'In Kangju there are five lesser kings ... all the five kings are subject to Kangju'.¹²⁸

The last reference clearly indicates that 'Kangju' must be considered both as the Han name of the 'state' (i.e. the realm or region) of Kangju-Sogdia, but also of the dominant tribe or dynasty which was controlling that realm at the time (i.e. the Kangju dynasty). Shishikina agrees, and argues that geo-political changes in Sogdia that became apparent towards the end of the second century BCE must have been as a result of Kangju hegemony:

'The historical situation of the first century BC suggests that these changes were related to the spread of the power of the Kangju, when this dynasty controlled Samarkand and Bukhara'.¹²⁹

The five lesser kings noted in the *Han Shu* were probably subordinate tribal groups within the realm of 'greater Kangju', and given that all are listed as having specific 'seats of government' (different to the two principal settlements named as belonging to the Kangju proper), may represent sedentised, agrarian-based 'peoples' living

HS 61.3A

HS 96A.15B

SI 123, Watson p. 234

HS 96A.17A

G. V. Shishikina, 'Ancient Samarkand - Capital of Soghd', *Bulletin of the Asia Inst.*

under Kangju hegemony.¹²⁰ The way of life of the dominant Kangju faction was clearly that of militarised pastoral nomadism, similar to the assessment of the lifeway of the Yuezhi soon after their arrival north of the Amu Darya that Zhang Qian provided to the Han court (see Chapter Five). If the Kangju state is thus to be identified with ancient Sogdia under Kangju dynastic hegemony, then a brief history of Sogdia up to and including the arrival of the Yuezhi will help to put the archaeological and textual evidence of Yuezhi/Kangju interaction considered below into a broader context.

A Brief History of Sogdia from the Sixth to the Late-Second Century BCE

Between 553 and 550 BCE, Cyrus II (r. 559-529), a leader of the Persian Achaemenid family, overthrew Astyages, King of the Medes, and brought Mesopotamia, Parthia and Anatolia under his control. By 539 he had conquered Bactria and much of Sogdia as well, where he established a line of fortresses on the Syr Darya. Sogdia was made the thirteenth satrapy of the Achaemenids, and paid tribute to Cyrus' successors. The oldest layers of Afrasiab – the ancient site of Samarkand – date from this Achaemenid period. But, whilst the city states of Sogdia and Bactria gained considerably through their incorporation into the Achaemenid Empire, they remained intent upon regaining their independence, which parts of Sogdia may have done by c. 400 BCE.¹²¹

Some two centuries after Cyrus' death, Alexander of Macedon reconquered much of Central Asia, following his arrival in Bactria in 329 BCE. Alexander's principal opponent in the region was the Achaemenid ruler Darius' former satrap, Bessus, who had Darius murdered in modern-day Shahr-i Qumis before proclaiming himself as his successor. Bessus' troops consisted of armoured cavalry from Bactria and Sogdia, which, following their defeat at Gaugamela, he took back across the Amu Darya after destroying its bridges. Alexander led his troops on forced marches through the desert, crossed the Amu Darya on inflated hide rafts, and confronted his opponents who immediately sued for peace. Bessus was executed; the Macedonians installed themselves in the satrapal palace at Maracanda (Samarkand) and Sogdia, following some seventy years of independence, found itself incorporated into the new Macedonian Empire. But while Alexander campaigned further north along the Syr Darya, the Sogdians, under the leadership of Spitamenes, rose in his rear and massacred a garrison of Macedonians, inflicting arguably the worst defeat of Alexander's career.¹²² Over the course of the ensuing eighteen months Alexander gained his revenge by reducing the fortified towns of Sogdia one by one, starting in the Hissar Mountains and moving along the Zaravshan Valley.¹²³ At the heart of ancient Soghd were the valleys of the Zeravshan and Kashkadarya, and in his vengeful campaign along these densely occupied valleys the Macedonians may have killed up to 120,000 Sogdians.¹²⁴ Arrian describes the campaign thus:

'Alexander himself, after crossing into Sogdiana, divided his remaining strength into five, one division to be commanded by Hephaestion, another by Ptolemy – a third by

¹²⁰ Hulsewe and Loewe, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-1, ns. 320, 321, 322, 323 and 324 provide comments on attempts to identify the five principal towns of the lesser kings.

¹²¹ See R. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich 1984) p. 111.

¹²² Arrian, *Book Four*, 5-7 (1971) *op. cit.*, pp. 208-211 for a description of this defeat.

¹²³ See for example A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988) pp. 117 and 109-10.

¹²⁴ See for example A. Nymark, *Culture and Art of Ancient Uzbekistan vol. I* (Moscow 1991) p. 155.

Perdiccas, a fourth by Coenus and Antabazus. The fifth he took over himself and proceeded with it to Maracanda, while the other four commanders carried on offensive operations as opportunity offered, storming the forts when some of the native tribesmen were trying to hide out or receiving the voluntary surrender of others. The greater part of Sogdiana was covered by these operations. Meanwhile Alexander, with the remainder of his force, marched against those parts of Sogdiana which were still in rebel hands, and had no difficulty in subduing them.¹⁴⁷

Amongst the many prisoners captured during the Sogdian campaign was the Princess Roxanne, daughter of another Sogdian opponent, Oxyartes. Alexander's subsequent decision to marry Roxanne was due partly to her beauty, but was also intended as a gesture to appease the rebellious Sogdians. After Alexander's death in Babylon in 323, Bactria and Sogdia immediately rebelled but were reconquered in c. 305 by his successor Seleucus Nicator (r. 311-281 BCE). However under Seleucus' son Antiochus I (r. 281-261), Bactria and (probably) Sogdia broke away again from Seleucid hegemony. None the less, Sogdia, along with much of Central Asia, was brought into the orbit of Hellenistic influence during its brief period of Macedonian conquest.

Antiochus I minted an extensive local coinage in the region, probably at Balkh (the 'capital' of Bactria). These were coins of large denominations – staters, tetradrachms and drachms. During the last two centuries before the Common Era, several series of diverse denominations and types were struck at Sogdian mints, and coins were widely used in Sogdia and Bactria, although perhaps only by the Greek population.¹⁴⁸ None the less the native population of Sogdia became used to Greek coinage during the Seleucid period, and when the inflow of Greek coins stopped following their independence from Antiochus I, local rulers began to mint their own. As Nymark has pointed out, however, these local issues were highly debased, and in fact were 'mere imitations of the most widespread Greek coins'.¹⁴⁹ Yet these imitations remain as crucial (and often the only) evidence of political, economic and social developments in Sogdia during the first century BCE. Furthermore, both Sogdian and Bactrian imitation issues also constitute potential evidence for the Yuezhi during the 'five-yabghu period'.

In the mid-third century (c. 250?) the Seleucid Governor of Bactria, Diodotus, established an independent Graeco-Bactrian kingdom (an event discussed in the next chapter), which may also have exercised a degree of control over Sogdia. In c. 230 Diodotus' son was overthrown by one of his satraps, a Greek settler called Euthydemus, who then ruled Graeco-Bactria for about forty years until c. 190 BCE. If Sogdia was indeed part of the incipient Graeco-Bactrian state, then the evidence of the Euthydemus imitation coinage indicates that some time late in the third century, during the lifetime of Euthydemus, Sogdia became an independent entity once more.¹⁵⁰ Euthydemus concluded a peace treaty with the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III in 206, but did not attempt to reconquer Sogdia. Instead the Graeco-Bactrians expanded south into India, establishing the Indo-Greek kingdoms. If the 'state' of Kangju is indeed to be identified as Sogdia, then it was probably during this period of

¹⁴⁷ Arrian *op. cit.*, Book Four, 16, p. 229.

¹⁴⁸ See for example E. Riveladze, *The Ancient Coins of Central Asia* (Tashkent 1987) p. 46.

¹⁴⁹ Nymark *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁵⁰ See O. Bopearachchi, 'The Euthydemus Imitation and the Date of Sogdian Independence', *Antiquity, Art and Archaeology* 2 (1991-2) pp. 11-12, also Riveladze *op. cit.*, p. 46.

post-Selucid independence, i.e. from c. 210 BCE, that the region came under the hegemony of the Kangju dynasty, which then continued to rule an independent Sogdiana until it came under Yuezhi-Kushan political influence. Høpferachich concludes that under the Kangju dynasty 'Sogdiana' ... probably remained free at least until the arrival of the Yuezhi in c. 130 BCE'.¹³⁹

The Yuezhi's Passage through Kangju Sogdiana

Although neither of the Chinese sources categorically states that the Yuezhi horde passed through Kangju, the only logical inference to be drawn from the texts is that they did. In addition, Ptolemy once again continued to unknowingly chart the course of the Yuezhi migration by noting a group he this time called the *Tacharoi* (surely another variant of Tocharian) dwelling in Sogdiana.¹⁴⁰ The conclusion that the Yuezhi must have passed through the region is further strengthened by the fact that the Han sources clearly show that Zhang Qian passed through Kangju during his search for the Yuezhi. The Han envoy was obviously well informed by the rulers of Dayuan as to the route followed by the Yuezhi – why provided him with guides to lead him to the Yuezhi unless they knew the migrants' route and probable whereabouts? – and thus is likely to have followed closely in the original footsteps of his quarry. The chronology is straightforward enough:

c. 132/1 BCE: The Yuezhi depart Dayuan and continue their migration to the west

That the Yuezhi continued westwards in their migration following their passage through (and possibly winter residency in) Dayuan is implicit in the key *Han Shu* passage already quoted: '... passing Dayuan (and) proceeding west to subjugate Daxia'.¹⁴¹ There are three possible route options west from Ferghana, whether starting from present-day Kokon in the centre of the valley, or Isfara in the southwest. The first is due north and then west, across the 2267 metre Kameik Pass and through Angren into Tashkent, thence southwest to Samarkand. A second and more direct route is due west through present-day Chugand and Zizzach, thence southwest into Samarkand. However, given that the Zeravshan Valley was the agricultural and population heartland of Sogdiana/Kangju (information perhaps given to the Yuezhi by the rulers of Dayuan who were no doubt anxious to encourage the Yuezhi to move on and seek suitable settlement lands elsewhere), the migrating horde may have chosen to follow a third route option – from Chugand south over the 3378 metre Sahrstan Pass, then down into the upper Zeravshan Valley. If the Yuezhi leadership decided upon this latter route, then it would probably have been necessary for them to winter in southern Ferghana before attempting the crossing of this high pass in the spring. Of course all this is highly speculative, but although there is no unambiguous textual evidence that this is what occurred, it is arguably the more likely course of events.

The *Shi Ji* also implies this in noting (in Watson's translation) that the Yuezhi 'moved far to the west, beyond Dayuan ...'¹⁴² which Zurcher reads as: 'They passed through Dayuan and to the west of that country ...'.¹⁴³ Between Dayuan and Daxia lay

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ *Prod. Geog.* vii, 2, 15; vi, 14, 7-14. See Tarn *op. cit.*, p. 517; and McCrindle (1885) *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹⁴¹ HS 96A.15A.

¹⁴² SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁴³ SJ 123.3b, trans. F. Zü. *Shi Ji* *op. cit.*, p. 360.

Kangju Sogdia, and thus anyone moving to the west, beyond Dayuan (or to the west of that country) and heading for northern Bactria would have to have passed through Sogdia. This probability is then strengthened by the unambiguous statement that Zhang Qian was taken to Kangju by his Dayuan guides and interpreters, and from there proceeded directly to the realm of the Da Yuezhi in northern Bactria.

The Mission of Zhang Qian: Stage Three

129-128 BCE: *Zhang Qian also passes through Kangju*

The *Han Shu* notes that:

‘... (the king of Dayuan) sent off (Zhang) Qian, providing him with interpreters and guides. He reached Kangju who passed him on to the Da Yuezhi’.¹⁴⁴

Or as Sima Qian puts it:

‘The king of Dayuan trusted his words and sent him on his way, giving him guides and interpreters to take him to the state of Kangju. From there he was able to make his way to the land of the Great Yuezhi’.¹⁴⁵

Despite its obvious military strength, Kangju (like Dayuan) must also have facilitated (or at least not impaired) the passage through its territory by both the migrating Yuezhi horde in c. 131 and the Han envoy in c. 128 BCE. With the strength of its military resources, Kangju was powerful enough to be not ‘easily defeated by Han forces’,¹⁴⁶ although it was ‘constrained to serve the Xiongnu’ in the east,¹⁴⁷ and (later) would acknowledge ‘nominal sovereignty’ (or even become ‘subservient to’) the Yuezhi in the south.¹⁴⁸ Does this acknowledgement suggest that parts of Sogdia (and the most populous parts at that – the Zeravshan valley and Samarkand) were actually invaded and defeated by the migrating Yuezhi, and then forced into a subordinate relationship thereafter? Certainly Torday is prepared to argue that not only did the Yuezhi defeat the Kangju dynasty in Sogdia, but in northern Bactria as well where he suggests the Kangju were also ruling:

‘We must accept that they took the region from the Kangju by force, in a war ... His (the Yuezhi king’s) subsequent conquest of Sogdiana was probably a by-product of his ambitions further south-east where he had brought Daxia under his sway’.¹⁴⁹

If Torday is correct, this says much about the military capabilities of the migrants that a displaced, previously fragmented and essentially homeless nomadic tribal confederation, soundly defeated twice during the previous three decades by the Xiongnu and the Wusun, was none the less able to invade and defeat the well-defended state of independent Kangju Sogdia. But there is little evidence to support Torday’s reconstruction. Furthermore, he has the Yuezhi settling in the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) delta rather than northern Bactria at the end of their migration, which is clearly

¹⁴⁴ HS 61.2A.

¹⁴⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

¹⁴⁶ HS 61.3A.

¹⁴⁷ HS 96A.15B.

¹⁴⁸ HS 96A.15B, and Zürcher *op. cit.*, p. 360.

¹⁴⁹ Torday *op. cit.*, p. 301.

incorrect as textual and archaeological evidence considered in the next chapter will show. He then suggests that the Yuezhi defeated the Kangju dynasty to gain control of Bactria where the evidence shows it was a group of Sakas (who had established hegemony over those regions of Bactria to both the north and south of the Amu Darya) that the Yuezhi were forced to defeat and evict to gain control of the region (as will also be considered in the following chapter). Ultimately there is no suggestion (other than the mention of 'nominal sovereignty') that the Yuezhi were ever forced to confront the Kangju militarily. If there had been any need for conflict, then given the subsequent history of the region (including the invasion of Sogdia by the Karakhanid Dynasty in the eleventh century, for example) the acceptance of Yuezhi suzerainty by Kangju would more accurately be seen as another example of that familiar phenomenon in Central Asian history often noted in this book - the greater military power of pastoral nomadic states over semi-sedentary, irrigation-based city states, whatever the relative size of their forces. Despite the fact that the ruling dynasty of Kangju was probably of a militarised, semi-nomadic ancestry, the bulk of the population was surely sedentised agriculturists.

The evidence might alternatively be interpreted as suggesting that Kangju (both the state and the dynasty) adopted a conciliatory and diplomatic position towards most of its neighbours, even including migrating hordes. Kangju acknowledged nominal sovereignty to both the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi; they also apparently assisted the Chinese by helping (or at least not impeding) Zhang Qian in his attempt to locate the Yuezhi, and subsequently they even sent a 'royal' son as envoy to the Han Court during the reign of Emperor Zheng. Undoubtedly, like the Wusun, Kangju felt that the Han court was remote and refused to become subject to the Protector General, but the dynasty was careful to offend no one - Han, Xiongnu or Yuezhi. It is therefore more likely that the Kangju rulers of Sogdia agreed to allow the Yuezhi unmolested passage through their territory, and accepted some form of subservient relationship thereafter to avoid military conflict.

It is not necessary to envisage violent military confrontation between the two dynasties, but rather a situation where local rulers recognised that the Yuezhi were powerful enough to be worth accepting as symbolic overlords. Certainly the later Mongol invasions would show that where cities made peace with the migrating, invading force without offering resistance, they could survive and prosper under the rule of pastoralist conquerors, whereas those who refused were destroyed utterly. The apparent ease with which the Yuezhi subjugated Bactria (just to the south of and contiguous to Sogdia) a short time later may also have been a salutary reminder to the Kangju dynasty. And, just as the Dayuans might have suggested the Zeravshan Valley in Sogdia as a possible resettlement location for the migrants, the rulers of Sogdia could in turn have nominated the fertile valleys north of the Amu Darya in northern Bactria for the Yuezhi to relocate, thus discouraging any thoughts the latter might have entertained of remaining in Sogdia itself.

The relationship established between the two dynasties in c. 131 BCE was to become an enduring one. Kangju-Sogdia would be drawn further and further into the Yuezhi-Kushan sphere of influence over the following centuries until substantial portions of its territory may have been incorporated into the Kushan Empire (although this is by no means certain). By 83 CE the Kushans would further cement this relationship through an alliance based on 'the ties of royal marriage' with the ruling

famly of Kangju.¹⁵⁰ Even at this early stage it was an ideal buffer for the Yuezhi between their new homeland north of the Amu Darya and the Wusun and Xiongnu to the north and east.

The Kangjuans (or at least some elements of the Sogdian populace) also acknowledged sovereignty to the Xiongnu in the east (presumably northeast),¹⁵¹ indicating the astonishing reach of Xiongnu influence. This is confirmed by the *Han Shu* inclusion of a statement in Zhang Qian's description of the 'state' of Dayuan that 'the area west of Wusun as far as Anu is close to the Xiongnu'.¹⁵² That is, Xiongnu influence apparently reached from the steppes of eastern Mongolia to as far west as northern Parthia. Even allowing for possible Han exaggeration or misinformation, this means that the Xiongnu were in seasonal occupation of (or at least exercised some form of nominal hegemony over) a very substantial western realm indeed, including the steppelands of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, from Lake Balkash to the Aral Sea.

Of course it might also be possible that this 'nominal sovereignty' took the ambiguous form of gift-giving, which the Xiongnu and Chinese sources interpreted as subordination, but which the locals (including the ruling dynasties of Dayuan and Kangju) understood merely as diplomatic courtesies. There is little evidence that the Xiongnu actively exercised military power further to the west, although they may have occupied temporary sites along the Middle Syr Darya, if the archaeological evidence of a burial mound at Zhaman-Yogan attributed to the Xiongnu by the tomb's Soviet discoverers in 1968 is accepted.¹⁵³ Torday is prepared to read this acknowledgment of nominal sovereignty as proof of Xiongnu military subjugation of Kangju, and attempts to date the beginning of that subjugation from early in the reign of Maodun. He finds the *Han Shu* passage evidence of 'Kangju's humiliation by Xiongnu in the east', and links this humiliating defeat to a steppe battle conducted by Maodun at Zaysan Nor in 203 BCE.¹⁵⁴ Torday's reconstruction is imaginative but unsupported by the evidence.

The Yuezhi Pursued by the Wusun from the Ili to Bactria?

The migration of the Yuezhi horde from Ysyk Kul through the Ferghana Valley and Sogdia to northern Bactria might not have been the measured affair that the evidence suggests, however, according to a reference in the *Han Shu*. There is a suggestion that, following his defeat of the Yuezhi in the Ili Basin, the victorious Wusun *Kunmo* may have followed or pursued the Yuezhi westwards through Dayuan and Kangju, perhaps all the way to Bactria.

'Once the *Kunmo* had grown to adulthood, he asked permission of the *Shanyu* to avenge his father's wrongs. Going west he attacked and defeated the Da Yuezhi, who again fled west, moving into the lands of Daxia. The *Kunmo* despoiled the population of Daxia and then remained there in occupation' (My italics).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ HS 77.4a.

¹⁵¹ HS 96A.16A.

¹⁵² HS 96A.19A.

¹⁵³ On the Zhaman-Yogan Xiongnu tomb see A.G. Maximova, M.S. Merschiev, B.I. Vasilberg, J.M. Lyndon-Baer and V. Karavaev (Antiquities of Chardara) (Alma-Ata 1968) pp. 175-190.

¹⁵⁴ Torday *op. cit.* pp. 301-2.

¹⁵⁵ HS 117A.

If indeed the Yuezhi were pursued by vengeful Wusun forces, their continued journey westwards might have resembled a flight, rather than a sedate migration. But there is no claim in this (or any other) passage that the Yuezhi were actually pursued by the Wusun, only that the *Kunmo*, following his victory over the Yuezhi in the Ili Basin, may have led a detachment of his forces as far west as Bactria, attacked (despoiled?) the population of some part (presumably the north) of that region, and then apparently remained there in temporary occupation. One could be tempted to read into this reference evidence that a contingent of Wusun forces (led by the *Kunmo* personally) were amongst those groups of nomads named in the classical sources as having contributed to the defeat of Bactria. Indeed, as will be shown in the next chapter, a number of scholars have identified the *Asioi* of the classical sources with the Wusun. However, even if groups of Wusun were active in northern Bactria between c. 133 and say 129/8 (which is not impossible) their role in the defeat and overthrow of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom seems insignificant compared to that of the Sakas and Yuezhi, as will be argued in Chapter Five. Whatever the circumstances, any Wusun residency in Bactria (if it occurred at all) was apparently short-lived. Zhang Qian makes no mention of any Wusun in the region in 129/8, and certainly by 126 at the latest the Wusun were back in their newly-acquired homeland near Ysyk Kul. There they quickly forged a new relationship with the Xiongnu based on more equal military strength and even mutual respect. As the *Han Shu* puts it:

'His [the *Kunmo*'s] forces gradually grew stronger, and at the death of the *Shanyu* he was no longer willing to attend to the court of the Xiongnu and serve them. The Xiongnu sent forces to attack him, but they had no success, and with an even greater respect for his supernatural powers they kept their distance'.¹⁵⁶

As will be shown in the final chapter, Junchen, the Xiongnu *Shanyu*, died in 126 and was succeeded by Yizhixie. And for some time (years?) prior to this succession the Wusun forces had been 'gradually' growing stronger. Thus if the *Kunmo* had proceeded as far west as Bactria sometime after 133/2, he must have returned home not too long afterwards, concerned that any continued excursion in Bactria would weaken the Wusun in the face of the Xiongnu. Just as Wusun stature and strength was clearly enhanced by their successful pursuit and defeat of the Yuezhi in the Ili Basin, so the Xiongnu were somewhat weakened during the early 120s by successful Han operations against them, and by the death of Junchen. With the Yuezhi out of the equation, the shifting balance of 'nomad' power along China's northwestern frontier then entered a new and (temporarily) more equitable phase.

IV

Archaeological Evidence of the Passage of the Yuezhi through Kangju/Sogdia

Introduction and History

The textual references clearly indicate, then, that the latter part of their migration probably took the Yuezhi through parts of Sogdia (i.e. the 'state' of ancient Kangju, or those areas of Sogdia under Kangju dynastic hegemony). But once again archaeological evidence of this apparent course of textually-attested events is hardly

overwhelming. The most likely location for the discovery of material evidence would probably be the long valley of the Zeravshan River, which has its source between the Farkistan and Zeravshan ranges in Tadjikistan, and then flows west through Samarkand and out into the deserts of Uzbekistan. The valley was fertile and, believed, providing excellent conditions for early Bronze Age agrarian settlements. The discovery in 1976 of the Bronze Age settlement of Sarazm on the upper reaches of the river showed that the valley had been settled for thousands of years, since somewhere between the mid fourth and third millenniums BCE, at least.¹⁵⁷ The Zeravshan valley might also have possibly been considered by the Yuezhi dynasty as a potential resettlement location for the migrating confederation, as it had no doubt been similarly viewed by a host of migrating pastoral nomads for thousands of years.

Archaeological investigation of the middle and lower Zeravshan Valley commenced in 1940 with a survey carried out on the construction site of the Katta-Kurgan reservoir, halfway between Samarkand and Bukhara, which resulted in the discovery of Sogdian burial mounds of the general 'Kushan period'.¹⁵⁸ Between 1945 and 1949 Terenozhkin conducted systematic research in the immense town site of ancient Samarkand, Afrasiab.¹⁵⁹ This was followed by expeditions from the Uzbek Branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the late 50s and early 60s, which thoroughly investigated a series of sites around Samarkand.¹⁶⁰ In 1946, meanwhile, the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic began investigating the upper reaches of the Zeravshan, east of Samarkand, which, under the direction of Yakubovsky, laid the ground work for a systematic archaeological survey of the entire length of the upper reaches of the valley.¹⁶¹ Yakubovsky's preliminary work was carried on through the 1960s by Mandleshtam in particular, who discovered numerous burial mounds and settlements, many of them apparently left by migrating nomadic groups during the early 'Kushan era' (as Soviet archaeologists tended to label the period between the second century BCE and the late second/early third century CE).¹⁶² However, within this broad and general chronology the attribution of particular types of burial structures and fortified settlements to specific groups of pastoral nomads was again very difficult. Mandleshtam was the first to attempt to narrow the search down somewhat in his address to the 1968 conference on the Kushans in Dushanbe:

¹⁵⁷ On Sarazm see A.I. Isakov, 'Sarazm: An Agricultural Centre of Ancient Sogdiana', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 8 (1994) pp. 1-17.

¹⁵⁸ See V.A. Shishkina, 'Arkheologicheskie nablyudeniya na stroitel'stve Katta-Kurganskogo vodokhranilisheha' (Archaeological Observations on the Building Site of the Katta-Kurgan Reservoir) *Izvestiya UzbSSR - Bulletin of the Uzbek Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences* (1940) No. 10, pp. 19-24.

¹⁵⁹ See A.I. Terenozhkin, 'Sogd i Chach' (Soghd and Chach) *KSIMK* 33 (1950) pp. 152-169; A.I. Terenozhkin, 'Raskopki na gorodishche Afrasiaba' (Excavations on the Site of Afrasiab) *KSIMK* 36 (1951) pp. 136-140.

¹⁶⁰ See V.I. Shishkina, 'Uzbekistanskaya arkheologicheskaya ekspeditsiya AN UzSSR' (The Uzbekistan Archaeological Expedition of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences. Field Work in 1956-1959), *IMK* 2 (Tashkent 1961) pp. 36-43; V.I. Shishkina, *Afrasiab - sokrovishchnitsa drevnei kultury* (Afrasiab - Treasury of Ancient Culture) (Tashkent 1966) pp. 8-19.

¹⁶¹ See A.Y. Yakubovsky, 'Itogi rabot Sogdiko-Tadzhikskoi arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii v 1946-1947 gg.' (Results of the Work of the Sogdian-Tadjik Archaeological Expedition of 1946-1947) *IMK* No. 15 (Moscow-Leningrad 1950) pp. 13-28.

¹⁶² See for example, A.M. Mandleshtam, 'Mogilnik v s. Zoson - verkhov'ya r. Zerafshana' (Burial Site in Zoson Village, Upper Zeravshan) *Izvestiya Otdel'noy Obshchestvennykh nauk* No. 40 (1965) pp. 29-44.

the dating of the investigated monuments (which is substantiated by the results of the excavations of tower sites) enables us to state with certainty that the 'belonged' nomadic peoples, who in the last third of the second century BC destroyed the Graeco-Bactrian Empire. Archaeology reveals four groups of nomads, which probably relate to four different tribes.¹⁶¹

Obelchenko, however, who from 1952 onwards carried out large-scale excavations of nomadic burial mounds in the middle and lower Zeravshan, particularly around Bukhara, linked all of the funerary monuments discovered in the Zeravshan to an invasion of 'Sarmatian' tribes in the second to first centuries BCE.¹⁶² Gorbunova has summarised Obelchenko's mid-50s theory thus:

'The discovery and investigation of Sogdian pastoralists' sites were begun by O.V. Obelchenko. He isolated among the cemeteries an earlier group dating from the second century BC to the first century AD, and a later group dating from the second to the fourth centuries AD. He regards both sites as relics of the Sarmatian tribes whose attacks contributed to the final defeat of Graeco-Bactria'.¹⁶³

As previously observed, Obelchenko's conclusions were questioned by Mandleshtam at the 1968 conference, who argued that the attribution of all of the mounds as Sarmatian was too generalised and superficial, particularly as various groups of burials displayed quite distinctively different characteristics.

The culture of all of them (the burial mounds) exhibits traits resembling the culture of the Sarmat tribes, but this is mainly a 'temporal' resemblance, which is observed over a vast area. A more concrete comparison points to links with areas to the N and NE of Central Asia'.¹⁶⁴

Zadneprovsky also disagreed with Obelchenko at the conference,¹⁶⁵ and has argued that similarities between possible Yuezhi tombs in northern Bactria and those discovered in the Bukharan oasis by Obelchenko suggest that the latter are also relics of the passage of the Yuezhi through Sogdia. 'The coincidence of the design, funeral ceremony and the accompanying inventory definitely point to their similarity'.¹⁶⁶

Artifacts from Nomadic Tombs in Ferghana and Sogdia

Unfortunately, even a detailed analysis of that 'accompanying inventory' of grave goods discovered at the various nomadic tomb sites does not clarify the matter.¹⁶⁷ Pottery vessels (including censers) occur in all types of graves, as would be expected.

A.M. Mandleshtam, 'Archaeological Data on the Origin and Early History of the Kushans', in *Central Asia in the Kushan Period* (1970) *op. cit.* p. 166.

¹⁶¹ See for example O.V. Obelchenko, 'Kuyu-Mazarsky mogil'nik' (The Necropolis of Kuyu-Mazar) *Trudy IIA, IA Uzb. SSR VIII* (Tashkent 1956) pp. 205-227, and O.V. Obelchenko, 'Kurgany okolo sel. Kfazara' (The Kurgans Near the Village of Khuzara) *IKUz* (Tashkent 1963) pp. 57-65.

¹⁶² Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.* p. 34, and see O.V. Obelchenko, 'Kurganny mogilnik epokhi Kushan v Bukharskom oazise' (Kurgan Barrows of the Kushan Epoch in the Bukhara Oasis), in *Central Asia in the Kushan Period*, vol. I (Moscow 1974) for a summary of Obelchenko's conclusions.

¹⁶³ Mandleshtam (1970) *op. cit.* p. 166.

¹⁶⁴ Zadneprovsky (1970) *op. cit.* pp. 148-9.

¹⁶⁵ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.* p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ See Gorbunova (1993) *op. cit.* for a general outline of material artifacts discovered at a range of Central Asian sites, pp. 36 ff.

Gorbunova argues that they have a strictly local character, circulating in the past only among the nomadic peoples, and not to distant or foreign peoples, and only over the local area.¹⁷⁰ This general and without doubt, statement is true, while remain, although they vary in shape from one location to the next. Bactrian and Sogdian rings and pobjets were almost all fashioned of a pattern which differentiates them from Khorezmiian ceramics, for example. Weapons have also been discovered in most nomadic cemeteries throughout former Soviet Central Asia, including swords, daggers, iron arrowheads and fragments from composite bows, all weapons generally associated with militarised nomads. Swords and daggers with a cross hilt are characteristic of both the Sogdian and Bactrian sites, whereas the majority of swords from other areas (i.e. areas probably not visited by the migrating Yuezhi) do not have cross-hilts, thus allowing for possible identification of the unique Sogdian and Bactrian examples as Yuezhi. Also characteristic of Bactrian and early Sogdian sites are arrowheads with barbed triangular flanges, which differ markedly from the triangular-flanged, straight-based arrowheads found in Khorezmiia, Turkmenia and at Kauchai culture sites (near Tashkent). The graves of Ferghana, emphasising that region's role throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages as an obvious funnel for all manner of Eurasian nomads, contain arrowheads of almost every type.¹⁷¹ The arrowheads discovered at early Kushan sites in Sogdia are similar to those found at Begram in Bactria, thus dating them to the 'late-Yuezhi early-Kushan period'.¹⁷²

Household objects, including knives, spindle-whorls and a variety of toilet-articles also demonstrate considerable local variation. Bronze mirrors have been found at sites all over former Soviet Central Asia, with Khorezmiia, Sogdia and Bactria yielding mirrors of a similar so-called 'Sarmatian' type, and Ferghana again yielding the largest number and greatest variety of examples.¹⁷³ Belt buckles have also been found in extensive numbers, indicating that most pastoral nomads probably wore belts with buckles. Differentiation of buckle types is also a potential source of tomb identification. The link between Sogdian and Bactrian sites is again apparent. Gorbunova notes that 'belt buckles from Bactrian and early Sogdian cemeteries are obviously of the same kind, and differ from the buckles of other places'.¹⁷⁴ The nomadic cultures associated with the different tomb types thus display a series of distinctive individual traits through their material possessions, but also a range of other features commonly shared between all nomadic 'peoples', which increases the difficulties of definitive attribution. Undeniably there is substantial evidence of nomadic passage along (and even temporary occupation of) the Zeravshan Valley, and it remains a matter of ongoing interpretation as to which tombs and funerary objects (if any) might be convincingly identifiable as Yuezhi. Shishkina finds no evidence

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 36.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39, and see Frumkin *op. cit.*, pp. 42 ff. for a detailed summary of Ferghana Valley archaeological discoveries, including grave artifacts.

¹⁷² See R. Gorneman, *Begram - Recherches Archéologiques et Historiques sur les Kouchans* (Paris 1946) Plate XXXVI, Nos. BG 290 a and b for excellent photographs of the Begram arrowheads with barbed triangular flanges. At the British Museum in January 2001 Elizabeth Errington was good enough to show me a colour transparency of a similar arrowhead from the Charles Masson collection. See also E. Errington, 'Rediscovering the Collections of Charles Masson', in M. Alam and D.F. Khushnig-Salter, eds., *Cons. Art and Chronology: Essays on the pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands* (Vienna 1999) pp. 207ff.

¹⁷³ See Gorbunova (1993) *op. cit.* p. 44, Fig. 5 for a map illustrating the 'Distribution of Mirrors'.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 41.

whichever of Yuezhi influence, although the conclusion that the densely populated Zeravshan valley proved ultimately unsuitable as a possible relocation site is self-evidently correct:

'In the second century BC the area between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya was the object of a massive invasion by peoples of a foreign culture, of which tribes of the Great Yuezhi made up a considerable part. Nevertheless the character of the Hellenized culture was preserved and there are no traces of new influences. One may assume that the Yuezhi passed through the Zeravshan Valley peacefully and did not remain there for long. There certainly would not have been enough room on the densely populated and cultivated lands of Sogd for masses of migratory peoples.'¹⁷⁵

Shishkina's claim that there is 'no trace' of the passage of the nomads clearly takes no account of the fact that significant numbers of podboy tomb types (of the most relevant style and body orientational direction) potentially attributable to the Yuezhi, have indeed been discovered along the Zeravshan. Furthermore, as Zadneprovsky has consistently maintained, similar tombs have been unearthed by archaeologists in all of the areas known to have been occupied by the Yuezhi during their migration, including the Gansu, the Ili Basin, the Ferghana and Zeravshan valleys and, as will be shown in the following chapter, northern Bactria. Furthermore, in addition to the similarity of tomb construction, many of the artifacts discovered in podboy tombs also display a range of common features, particularly from tombs in Sogdia and Bactria. Gorbunova summarises this conclusion by noting the similarity between 'Bactrian and early Sogdian cemeteries with their distinctive types of pottery, weapons, belt buckles and women's clothing'.¹⁷⁶ Thus, while it is clearly impossible to prove that these tombs and their artifacts were left along the Zeravshan by the migrating Yuezhi, there is sufficient evidence of similar material discoveries at every location along the Yuezhi's migration route to mount at least a circumstantial case that they possibly were.

Anthropological Evidence

In addition to the material evidence of tomb construction and contents, Soviet and Russian anthropologists and craniologists have attempted to provide physiognomic evidence of Yuezhi ethnicity during their residency in Sogdia and northern Bactria by examining the skulls of the deceased occupants. The 'science' of craniometry concentrates on the relationship between the length and breadth of the skull, dividing the length into the smaller breadth and then multiplying by 100 (to remove the fraction). A value of less than 75 indicates a 'long-headed' individual (called dolichocephalic in deceased, fleshless skulls), while a ratio of 80 plus is labelled 'broad-headed' (or brachycephalic). Skulls falling between 75 and 79.99 are called mesodolichocephalic or mesobrachycephalic, depending on whether they are closer to 75 or 80 on the scale. The problem with attempting to use this particular technique as archaeological evidence is that, as Mallory and Mair so succinctly put it, 'a single cemetery might reveal a variety of skull types and, while the archaeologist might find cultural uniformity across the cemetery, the physical anthropological report reads like a description of a source at the UN'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Shishkina *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷⁶ Gorbunova *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁷ Mallory and Mair *op. cit.*, p. 232. They provide an excellent introduction to craniology on pp. 231-

Craniological evidence should thus be regarded as considerably more speculative than even the tentative archaeological conclusions outlined above, particularly in a region quite appropriately described as the 'crossroads of Asia', where over the course of several millennia a great variety of 'peoples' of different ethnic and anthropological types were in constant contact with each other. This diversity was reflected in the multicultural Kushan Empire, which was, as Soviet anthropologist Zekenkova noted, made up of 'numerous peoples undergoing an independent ethno-genetic development'.¹⁷⁸ Anthropologists have isolated two particular cranial groups prevalent in Central Asia during the centuries immediately before and after the Common Era – the mesobrachycranial (of 'western' Central Asian origin) and the brachycranial (of 'northeastern' Central Asian origin) – both of which they have generally categorised as 'Europoid'.¹⁷⁹ Zelinsky and Rychkov argued that 'the type of the early-Kushans can be regarded as "north-Europoid"' and was apparently 'closer to the Yuezhi types'.¹⁸⁰ They went on to suggest that:

'About 130 BC the Yuezhi and other Kushans brought from Central Asia to the region of Bactria and Badakshan an anthropological type related to a wide range of North European forms known from Europe to the Sayano-Altai. Apparently the local ethnic and anthropological medium was not alien to the newcomers, but in the case of the Kushans proper we find a gradual intensification of the influence of Pamir elements'.¹⁸¹

In other words, archaeological evidence (as analysed by Soviet craniologists in the 1960s) indicated that representatives of identifiably Mediterranean/Europoid anthropological stock were widespread across Inner Asia, from the Black Sea to the Altai. Clearly these were descendants of the earlier Indo-European-speaking nomads whose migrations were discussed in the first chapter of this book. So widespread was this diffusion that it is hardly surprising to find that during subsequent migrations (such as that by the Yuezhi) the nomads came into contact with other tribes 'not (anthropologically) alien' to the newcomers. None the less anthropologists have argued somewhat optimistically that it is possible to identify specific sub-types within the broader 'Europoid' superstructure, which allows for a tentative identification of early-Kushan and Yuezhi types. This argument remains far from convincing.

The Europoid types also came into contact with other non-Europoid types throughout this region of intense ethno-cultural interaction. In the area north of Ysyk Kul, for example, the 'Europoid' Yuezhi came into contact with 'members of the Central Asian interfluvial race and South Siberian types'.¹⁸² Evidence from both the Ferghana and Zeravshan valleys indicates the presence of Central Asian interfluvial, South Siberian and Mediterranean/Europoid types, which again is just what one would expect given the constant traffic flow. The best that can be said about this form of evidence is that it perhaps allows one to trace the spread/movement of Indo-Europeans from the Ysyk Kul region back through Ferghana and Sogdia into Bactria,

¹⁷⁸ V. Y. Zekenkova, 'Some Craniological Materials of the Kushan Times in Central Asia', in *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (1970) *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁹ See Gorbunova *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁰ N. S. Zelinsky and Y. G. Rychkov, 'On the Question of the Ethnic Anthropology of the Kushans', in *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (1970) *ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Gorbunova *op. cit.*, p. 42.

although positively identifying these Indo-European types with the Yuezhi is clearly improbable. Indeed, even isolating the specific anthropological type of the Yuezhi (which was in any case a confederation) is almost impossible, as Zelinsky and Rychkov themselves have stated: 'the anthropological type of the Yuezhi is still unclear because conclusive material is far from sufficient'.¹⁸³

The Evidence of 'Sogdian' Statuettes

Further archaeological evidence of Yuezhi activity in Sogdia might be provided by the attribution of a group of Sogdian statuettes unearthed at several sites in and around Samarkand, particularly at Tah Barzu south of the city, and also at Afrastab. A particular form type of female statuette discovered at these (and other nearby) sites, characterised by the position of the hands under the breasts or resting on the upper stomach, and with distinctive facial features and dress, has been extensively analysed.¹⁸⁴ The primary focus group of figurines is distinct and stable in form – a female figure with small protruding breasts and very slim arms bent sharply at the elbows so that her hands are resting on her upper stomach. Related groups include statuettes with stumps instead of arms, or with arms resting on the lower rather than upper stomach. The three groups are united by their similar style of facial features. As a stylistic form, similar examples are known from Mesopotamia as early as the 2nd Millennium BCE, although it has been suggested that the form probably dates much further back into antiquity.¹⁸⁵

Where there might be some link between a particular sub-type of these figurines and the Yuezhi is through a comparative coroplastic analysis of costume styles. Examples from the Samarkand area show a variety of clothing styles – pleats on the lower part of the dress; a looser dress worn over long trousers with folds falling from the waist; a long pleated dress with pleats falling from the waist; or with pleats falling all the way from the shoulders.¹⁸⁶ Figurines clothed in a long dress with a flared lower half have been tentatively attributed to the Yuezhi during their (brief) occupation of the Zeravshan valley by Abdullaev.¹⁸⁷ The identification is strengthened somewhat by the discovery of similarly attired figurines from other Yuezhi and early Kushan sites, notably Tillya-tepe and Dalverzin-tepe.¹⁸⁸ As has already been observed, Sogdia lay at the heart of a network of ancient migration and trade routes, and it is only to be expected that Sogdian art was subjected to a range of stylistic influences, including from pastoral nomads and migrating oasis-dwellers. As Kidd puts it, 'the nomadic legacy of the peoples living in this region must also be recognised as an important factor in the formation of style in Sogdian art generally'.¹⁸⁹ That the Yuezhi

¹⁸³ Zelinsky and Rychkov *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁸⁴ Fiona Kidd, 'The Chronology and Style of a Group of Sogdian Statuettes', in S. Lieu and C. Benjamin, eds., *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History*, Silk Roads Studies VI (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002) pp. 197 ff.

¹⁸⁵ P. Ucko, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece* (London 1968). See also M. Combaras, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (London 1982) for early examples of similar figurines.

¹⁸⁶ Kidd *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁷ K. Abdullaev, in R. K. Suleimanov, *Drevnii Nakshab: Problemy Tsvivilizatsii Uzbekistana VII v. do n. e.* (Tashkent 2000) p. 203.

¹⁸⁸ On the Tillya-tepe figurines see V. I. Sarianidi, *Khram i Nekropol Tillyatepe* (1989) p. 53 fig. 15 and p. 57 figs. 12, 25 and 30, on the Dalverzin-tepe figurines see K. Abdullaev, 'Portrayal of musicians in Bactrian terracotta figurines', in *Information Bulletin* 7 (1982) 2–56 figs. 4–5.

¹⁸⁹ Kidd *op. cit.*, p. 211.

occupied, if only for a relatively brief period, parts of the Zeravshan valley including the Samarkand oasis is quite probable, given the cumulative textual and archaeological material considered above. The possibility that additional evidence of their residency might be found through a petrographic analysis of the ceramic fragments unearthed at probable Yuezhi sites in the region is worthy of further consideration.

Archaeological Evidence: Conclusion

In conclusion, archaeological evidence for the Yuezhi in both Sogdia and Ferghana remains inconclusive at best. Mass migrations of nomadic 'peoples' would hardly be expected to leave a substantial archaeological record anyway, given that they generally did not construct settlements or 'townships' meant to last longer than a winter season. During the long, cold Central Asian winters the dead would be buried beside the encampments, and in the spring the tribes would move on in search of new dwelling places. This would appear to have been the lifeway of the Yuezhi during the two or three years of migration between their eviction from the Ili Basin in c. 133/2 and their arrival at their new homeland in northern Bactria in c. 130 BCE. Thus the only record of their passage through the Ferghana and Zeravshan valleys would be their funerary monuments and the grave goods they contained. The incidence of podboy tombs in both regions (mostly with a common north-south orientation), the similarity of household objects, weapons, arrowheads and belt buckles in those tombs, and the evidence of Sogdian statuettes (not to mention cranial index ratios) provides clearly circumstantial but perhaps cumulatively tenable evidence that this is indeed a possible record of the passage of the Yuezhi. When used in conjunction with complementary references in the Han annals, one is able to construct a reasonably coherent narrative account of the most probable course of events during this penultimate stage of the migration of the Yuezhi.

V

Conclusion: The Migration of the Yuezhi (Stage Two)

As a result of their defeat by the Wusun in 133 or 132 BCE then, the Yuezhi dynasty (and the substantial confederation of tribes which remained loyal to it) was forced to resume its migration westwards, following a probable route through present-day Almaty and Biskek, then southwest into the Ferghana Valley (called Dayuan in the Chinese sources). Here they may have wintered in the Isfara region before resuming their journey in the spring (of 132 or 131), travelling west and south into the Zeravshan valley of Sogdia (ancient Kangju in the sources) and perhaps following it into the Samarkand and Bukharan oases. There is a possibility that the victorious Wusun *Kionno* may have harassed the Yuezhi during this latter stage of their migration, all the way from the Ili Valley to the Amu Darya, but if so he does not seem to have interrupted the progress of the journey. This Wusun contingent may also have been restive in northern Bactria during the final years of the fourth decade of the second century BCE, and is perhaps amongst those named in the classical sources as one of the tribes responsible for the overthrow of the Graeco-Bactrians, events considered in Chapter Five.

The inference of several references in the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* and of Soviet and Russian archaeological research, strongly suggests that the migration route must have passed through Dayuan, a populous, sedentary and inhabited state centred upon the Ferghana Valley. In the 'Memor of Zhang Qian' in the *Han Shu*, for example, Ban Gu states: 'The Yuezhi thereupon went far away, passing Dayuan and proceeding west'.¹⁹⁰ Zadneprovsky has recorded 80 different burial sites in the Ferghana Valley, with almost 2000 excavated burial mounds. Single podboy burials have been found in the southwestern, northern and eastern parts of the valley, mostly concentrated in the Levailaka-Isfara-Sokhta interfluvium in southern Kyrgyzstan where over 300 podboy burials have been located, representing some 75% of the total number studied in Ferghana. Although originally attributed to a separate culture by Barzudin in 1960, Zadneprovsky has argued for their re-attribution to the migrating Yuezhi, on the basis of their similarity to other podboy sites also tentatively attributable to the Yuezhi.¹⁹¹ If he is correct, this suggests that it was in this far southwestern corner of the Ferghana Valley that the Yuezhi may have passed the winter of 133-2 or 132-1 BCE.

The following year the journey was resumed, and the Yuezhi entered the realm of Kangju, a dynasty controlling a region probably to be identified as Sogdia and the Zeravshan valley. 'Kangju' was the Han name for both the 'state', but also for the powerful Kangju dynasty, which may have been ruling Sogdia since it gained independence from the Graeco-Bactrians late in the third century BCE during the reign of the Graeco-Bactrian King Puthydemus. Ptolemy provides incidental evidence of the identification of Kangju with Sogdia, and once again continued to unknowingly chart the course of the Yuezhi migration by noting a group he this time called the *Tachori* (Tocharians) dwelling in Sogdia.¹⁹² Archaeologists have unearthed podboy tombs potentially attributable to the Yuezhi at the periphery of the Bukharan and Samarkand oases, as well as in the upper valley of the Zeravshan. All are similar in design, funeral ceremony and 'accompanying inventory' of artifacts to other probable Yuezhi podboy monuments found in northern Bactria.¹⁹³ Furthermore, the coroplastic analysis of a group of Sogdian statuettes, and anthropological research based on craniology, provides some additional (although highly speculative) supporting evidence of the passage of the Yuezhi through Sogdia.

Both the *Han Shu* and *Shi Ji* imply some level of diplomatic interaction between the Yuezhi and Kangju dynasties prior to the Yuezhi's arrival in northern Bactria.¹⁹⁴ Although Kangju is described as a 'small' country in the Chinese sources, its military strength was substantial, with some 120,000 persons able to bear arms, according to Ban Gu,¹⁹⁵ of which 90,000 were skilled archer warriors according to Sima Qian.¹⁹⁶ Unlike Dayuan, it was described as powerful enough to be 'not easily defeated by Han forces',¹⁹⁷ but none the less was 'constrained to serve the Xiongnu' in the east,¹⁹⁸ and acknowledged 'nominal sovereignty' (or was 'subservient to') the Yuezhi in the

¹⁹⁰ HS 61.1A.

¹⁹¹ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁹² Ptol. *Geog.* vii, 2, 15, vi, 14, 7-14. See Tarn (1938/1951) *op. cit.*, p. 517, and McHardie (1885) *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹⁹³ Zadneprovsky (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ HS 96A.15B, SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

¹⁹⁵ HS 96A.15B.

¹⁹⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁹⁷ HS 61.3A.

¹⁹⁸ HS 96A.15B.

south.¹⁹⁹ Kangju displayed obvious ability at inter-state diplomacy by balancing these competing (and essentially opposed) interests – recognising the nominal sovereignty over parts of its country by both the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi – anding Zhang Qian and subsequent Han envoys, and later sending a Kangju prince as envoy to China.

It is therefore probable that the rulers of Kangju agreed to give the Yuezhi safe passage through their territory, and accepted some form of subservient relationship to avoid military conflict. The Sogdian dynasty may even have encouraged the Yuezhi to settle at the southern extremities of their territory, and suggested the fertile river valleys north of the Amu Darya as an ideal homeland for the migrants. Kangju would be drawn further and further into the Yuezhi-Kushan field of influence over the following centuries until the southern portions of its territory were probably incorporated into the Kushan Empire, or at least into its sphere of influence.²⁰⁰ By 83 CE the Kushans would further cement this relationship through an alliance based on a 'bond of royal marriage' with the ruling family of Kangju.²⁰¹ It was an ideal buffer for the Yuezhi between their new northern Bactria homeland and the Wusun and Xiongnu realms in the steppes to the north and east.

Possible in the spring of the year 130 BCE then, after a migration of some thirty-two years' duration covering many thousands of kilometres, the Yuezhi quit their encampments in the Zeravshan valley and prepared to make the relatively short journey south towards the fertile valleys to the north of the Amu Darya. In order to settle there, however, they would be forced to evict a resident group of highly militarised Sakas, as will be shown below. Two years later, in the Yuezhi's new homeland, Han envoy Zhang Qian (who had left Xian almost a decade earlier, probably in 139, and pursued the Yuezhi all the way from the Gansu to the Oxus) finally caught up with his quarry.

¹⁹⁹ HS 96A 15B, and Zürcher *op. cit.*, p. 360.

²⁰⁰ Whether Sogdian Kangju or Khorezmia were ever actually part of the Kushan Empire is a matter of some conjecture. See, for example, Svend Helms, 'Ancient Chorismia: The Northern Edge of Central Asia from the 6th Century B.C. to the mid-4th Century A.D.', in David Christian and Charles (eds.), *Worlds of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern* (Turnhout 1998), pp. 85–6, and private correspondence who has argued that Khorezmia at least remained nominally and

²⁰¹ HS 97 4a.

Chapter Five

The Conquest of Northern Bactria

Introduction

In perhaps the year 130 BCE then, the Yuezhi dynasty, along with the various groups that were loyal to it, arrived at their penultimate destination in the fertile river valleys to the south of Kangju Sogdia. Following their devastating defeat by the Xiongnu and rapid escape northwards in 162, some thirty years of semi-nomadic, semi-sedentary residency in the Ili Valley, then 133 or 132 expulsion at the hands of the Wusun, and their subsequent migration through the Ferghana Valley and Sogdia, the Yuezhi settled in northern Bactria, south of the Zeravshan and north of the Amu Darya. Here, in one of the cultural and geographical heartlands of Inner Asia, they were forced to confront and evict a powerful group of resident Sakas – and as a consequence establish a loose hegemony over Bactria proper – before settling into a relatively peaceful, semi-sedentised lifeway. The campaign against the Sakas was not only a significant event in the political and cultural history of Bactria, but provides yet another example of the relevance of the domino principle of pastoral nomadic migrations to Eurasian history in general.

That the Yuezhi confederation was in any sort of shape at all to rapidly defeat and evict the Sakas, and then effect the *de facto* subjugation (although not yet an occupation) of the formerly powerful and wealthy Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the south, is testimony to the continuing strength of the dynasty and to the ability of its leadership to hold the federation together during the preceding decades of trial and uncertainty. It is self-evident that the Yuezhi had maintained their military capability. Despite their defeat and eviction from the Ili by the Wusun (a campaign perhaps more indicative of Wusun strength and their tactics of surprise than of Yuezhi weakness), the Yuezhi had been able to quickly regroup. They were untroubled in their passage through the settled and well-defended Ferghana state, and possibly spent some months camped unmolested in the southwestern corner of the valley. They had then moved into Sogdia, a region that had proven particularly troublesome for Alexander the Great, and which in 132/1 was under the control of the powerful Kangju dynasty. Again the Kangju Sogdians appear to have deliberately avoided any military confrontation with the migrants, and the Yuezhi were probably also able to occupy parts of the densely-populated Zeravshan valley for a brief period, perhaps the winter of 131/0.

It comes as no surprise, then, that upon arriving in northern Bactria, probably in the spring of 130, the Yuezhi archers were able to quickly dislodge the occupying Sakas, and impose their own political and military will upon the 'native' Bactrians (that is, both the Greek and Iranian-speaking populations) south of the Amu Darya. It would be another half century, however, before the Yuezhi found the desire (or necessity) to cross the river en masse and occupy Bactria proper, an action perhaps motivated by internal divisions within the federation that led to another fragmentation, this time into five ethno-tribal units (or *yabghu*). When Zhang Qian visited the Yuezhi in

(287 only two years after their arrival), the dynasty was already comfortably settled in northern Bactria and had also established some sort of dominance over the urban centres south of the Amu Darya, while still allowing them to retain a degree of independence. Zhang Qian was able to visit both the Yuezhi and the Bactrian capital, and in so doing clearly differentiate between the Yuezhi in residence north of the river and the 'state' of Bactria proper, before returning to the Yuezhi for a final (unsuccessful) attempt to persuade them to join the Han in an alliance against the Xiongnu. Once the decision was made by the Yuezhi to occupy Bactria some fifty years later (c. 80 BCE²), any semblance of Bactrian independence disappeared completely, and the Yuezhi yabghu ruled their respective Bactrian 'kingdoms' until they were once again reunited in c. 45 CE by Kujula Kadphises, prince of the Kueizhuang yabghu and founder of the Kushan state. The five-yabghu period and the careers of Kujula and his successors must belong to a different study, however, and will not be addressed here.

It is the intention of this final chapter in the early history of the Yuezhi to examine a range of issues associated with their 'conquest' of northern Bactria. Firstly, the pre-Yuezhi history of Bactria and the role of the Sakas in at least the partial overthrow of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom; secondly, the circumstances under which the Yuezhi occupied northern Bactria, expelled the Sakas and attained political hegemony over Bactria; thirdly, the probable location of the 'principal city' of the Yuezhi and the lifeway they followed during a half-century of residency in the region; and fourthly, the attempt by Zhang Qian to persuade the Yuezhi to return to China, his observations on Bactria, and his return to Xian. Again the evidence, although more textually diverse, remains fragmentary and ambiguous. References in the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* are still fundamental, but are supplemented and supported by a surprisingly wide range of classical sources including Polybius, Ptolemy, Strabo, the epitome of Justin and the anonymous prologues to Pompeius Trogus's lost history. This diversity of sources illustrates the fact that the overthrow of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom was an occurrence of 'world historiographical' significance, in that it was, in the words of Barthold, 'the first event of world history recorded both in Western (Greek) and Far-Eastern (Chinese) sources'.³

Archaeological evidence of the residency of the Yuezhi north of the Amu Darya is more substantial though still inconclusive, and sheds some light on both the location of the Yuezhi's principal stronghold of Jianshi, and on the probable lifeway followed by the newly-arrived migrants. In addition, numismatic analysis becomes a valuable tool for the first time, although more in its provision of evidence of the pre-Yuezhi history of Bactria and for the overthrow of the Greco-Bactrians than for the Yuezhi themselves. Through a consideration of each of these evidential strands this final chapter attempts to reconstruct a possible course of events during this crucial period in Yuezhi and Inner Asian history. The starting point for any such reconstruction must be to place these events in the wider context of the political and cultural history of the region in which the Yuezhi confederation now found itself. Bactria lay at the very crossroads of ancient Eurasia, and had been a region of cultural diversity and significance since long before the arrival of the Yuezhi. In order to fully assess their impact upon the region, this chapter begins with an account of the history of Bactria up to 130 BCE.

² Barthold, 'A Short History of Turkestan', in *Four Studies on Central Asia*, Svoboda (ed.), p. 5.

A Brief History of Bactria from the Bronze Age to the Arrival of the Yuezhi

Bronze and Early Iron Age

It will be recalled from Chapter One that, in the Late Bronze Age, urbanisation shifted eastwards from its origins in Southwest Asia into the oases of the Central Asian plains. In these regions where only simple forms of agriculture and small village lifeways had previously dominated, there occurred late in the third millennium a dramatic increase in urban development in the Margiana oasis, in oases in northern Bactria fed by the Amu Darya, and along the Zeravshan valley.² The distinctive culture that emerged profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Sogdian and Bactrian culture, and firmly established Bactria in particular as one of the syncretic centres of a trans-Eurasian network of cultural exchanges – a status which that region would maintain and enhance at least until the decline of the Kushan Empire in the mid-third century C.E. However, the earliest cities in the region (such as Altyn Tepe and Namazga-depe in Margiana) suffered a decline early in the second millennium, after which their populations seemed to drift eastwards into northern Bactria.

Between c. 2200 and 2000, new urban communities appeared along the middle Amu Darya, and the region around Merv became the principal centre of this so-called 'Oxus Civilisation'. These later sites represented new developments in settlement patterns centred upon a large fortified centre called a *qala* by the Soviet archaeologist Tolstov.³ The most important of these Bactrian fortified sites include those of Sapalli and Dashly in northern Afghanistan. There is evidence of a high level of craftsmanship and mercantile activity, as well as of the early use of spoked wheels and horse riding. The settlement at Sapalli had a carefully-designed fortress with mud-brick walls and towers that probably housed 250 to 300 people. Masson described the essence of the 'Oxus Civilisation' in particular, and the 'Bactrian-Margiana Archaeological Complex' (BMAC) in general, thus:

'The pastoral/agricultural economy is organically combined with a developed commerce ... Exceptionally numerous are metallic objects, including notably weapons – especially battle-axes with cross-guards and tanged spearheads – and a variety of toilet articles, ranging from mirrors to pins, bracelets and rings'.⁴

The cities of the Oxus Civilisation appeared to prosper precisely because of their location at the centre of an early emerging world system based on trans-Eurasian mercantile interchange. As a result, they were exposed to a wide range of cultural influences which gradually altered and enriched the ethnic, linguistic and cultural orientation of Bactria in particular. Amiet has argued, for example, that the BMAC was a frontier zone where Elamite traders exchanged goods with steppe nomads. The influence of the steppes is obvious: much of the iconography of seals, cylinders

² See Ligabue and Salvatori (1989) *op. cit.*; a series of articles in *Antiquity*, vol. 68, no. 259 (June 1994), and V. Sarianidi, *Drevnosta stran Margash* (Ashgabad 1990) for example.

³ See C. U. Lamborg-Karlovsky, 'The Oxus Civilization: the Bronze Age of Central Asia', in *Antiquity* 68, no. 259 (June 1994) p. 353.

⁴ Masson (1992) *op. cit.* p. 343.

⁵ P. Amiet, 'Elam and Bactria', in Ligabue and Salvatori, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 125-40.

and metal ornaments discovered at Oxus Civilisation sites is clearly of the steppe-nomadic tradition.⁶ But Sarianidi has suggested that there was an equally powerful influence at play in Bactria derived from a developing 'Iranian' cultural tradition, and indeed there is some evidence to suggest that Zoroastrianism itself probably emerged in Margiana sometime between 1400 and 1000 BCE.⁷ David Christian has summed up this extraordinary Bactrian exchange between sedentary agriculturists, merchants, steppe-nomads and Indo-Iranian religious influences, by noting 'the syncretic quality of the Oxus civilization as the focus of Eurasia-wide systems of intellectual and commercial exchanges'.⁸

Throughout the second and first millenniums BCE the populations of the steppes and the cities merged their lifeways and religions, and the Iranian language gradually displaced the original dialects. Bactria remained at the hub of ancient Eurasia, an important link between China, India, Southwest Asia and the steppes. Late in the second millennium there was a marked decline in the level of urbanisation within the Oxus civilisation, although by soon after 1000 BCE activity was renewed in association with the construction of extensive irrigation systems.⁹ The settlements that emerged during the first millennium were extensively fortified – essentially very large *qala* – and they provide evidence of increased levels of militarisation during this so-called 'Scythic Era'.¹⁰ The relative isolation of each of these fortified urban centres led to the creation of a series of small fortified city-states each vulnerable to attacks from neighbours, pastoralists and the armies of the west, as first the Achaemenids, followed by the Macedonians under Alexander, would demonstrate.

The Achaemenids

During the seventh century before the Common Era, King Cyaxares established Median hegemony over large areas of Mesopotamia and the western parts of Central Asia. With their capital at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), the Medes formed an alliance with the Scythians and destroyed the Assyrians at Ninevah in 612. They probably also captured substantial regions of southern Turkmenistan that would later be known as Parthia.¹¹ Sometime between 553 and 550, Cyrus II (r. 559-529) – a leader of the Persian Achaemenid family – overthrew the Median king Astyages and adopted the Median royal title of 'Great King, King of Kings, King of Lands'. This event marked the beginning of Persia's rise to historical significance. As Dandamaev puts it: 'In the course of the next two hundred years the country was to take a leading role in the political vicissitudes of the classical world and the Near East'.¹²

⁶ See H.P. Francfort, 'The Central Asian Dimension of the Symbolic System in Bactria and Margiana', in *Antiquity* vol. 68, no. 259 (June 1994) pp. 406-18, for example.

⁷ V. Sarianidi, 'Temples of Bronze Age Margiana', in *Antiquity* vol. 68, no. 259 (June 1994), pp. 388-397; V. Sarianidi, 'New discoveries at ancient Gonur', in *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* vol. 2 (3) (1995) pp. 289-310, see also Helms (1998) *op. cit.* pp. 77 ff. Helms claims Khorezmia as 'perhaps also the birthplace of the prophet Zoroaster who founded one of the world's most influential religions'. The dates of Zoroaster's ministry are debated, ranging from the 12th to the 6th centuries BCE, p. 82.

⁸ Christian (1998) *op. cit.* p. 114.

⁹ See A. Askarov, 'The beginnings of the Iron Age in Transoxiana', in A.H. Dani and V.M. Masson, eds., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* vol. I *op. cit.* pp. 454-5.

¹⁰ On the urban sites of the near-by Dahistan culture see C.C. Lamborg-Karlovsky, 'The Bronze Age Dahistan of Central Asia', in *Antiquity* vol. 68 (1994) pp. 398-405.

¹¹ See M.A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden 1989) p. 10.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 20.

successes in a vast conquered Mesopotamia (Herodotus 1.101-102, 127-128). The empire also established Achaemenid influence in the Balkans and the Caucasus, which he comments by including a list of satrapies in the region. Achaemenid inscriptions include Bactria in the list of satrapies, and Bactrian representatives are to be seen offering gifts to the Achaemenid king. Bactria, like other 'states' under Achaemenid hegemony, was not fully independent and was ruled by satraps appointed by the Achaemenid king, selected from amongst their closest relatives. However, when Cyrus was overthrown by the Massagetae queen Tomyris during a failed campaign to conquer the land, most parts of the fragile empire quickly rebelled.¹⁸ His successors, Darius I (529-522) and Darius II (521-486) restored Achaemenid power over most of Central Asia, using troops from a range of peoples within their empire, joined by the Sakas. Darius may even have been of Bactrian descent, and early in his reign, when much of the empire was again in rebellion, Bactria was one of the few 'states' that remained loyal to him. Its governor Datarhush was probably a prince.¹⁹ In the reforms that followed the suppression of the revolts, Bactria was made the twelfth satrapy and was required to pay 300 talents (or approximately 30 tonnes) of silver annually.

The final years of the reign of Darius' successor Xerxes (486-465) were dominated by internecine struggle, and the king was ultimately murdered by his youngest son Artaxerxes. Xerxes' third son Hystaspes (Vishtaspa) was satrap of Bactria at the time, and initially remained outside the family struggle. In 464, however, when Artaxerxes was occupied with administrative reforms, Vishtaspa attempted to seize the throne with the help of Bactrian nobles but was defeated by his brother in battle. By c. 400 Khorezma and parts of Sogdia had probably freed themselves from Achaemenid control,²⁰ while Bactria seemed to be in a semi-permanent state of revolt. Frye suggests that it was the relative independence of these Central Asian satrapies that explains their fierce resistance to attempts by Alexander to conquer them.

None the less, when Darius II (423-404) was forced to confront the invading Macedonians at Gaugamela on October 1st 331 BCE, the Bactrians were still sufficiently part of the Persian Empire to be willing to provide up to 1,000 cavalry on the left wing of the Achaemenid army.²¹ Darius' defeat sealed the fate of the Empire and allowed for the restoration of independence amongst many of the satrapies. But despite their frequent revolts, the city-states of Central Asia benefited considerably from their long period of incorporation into the durable structure of the Persian Empire, the greatest and best-organised political entity the world had thus far seen. In particular, several centuries of relative peace, extensive road-building and the Achaemenids' support of agriculture and irrigation²² had helped re-establish Bactria as very much a part of the Eurasian-wide trading and cultural network. The Persians

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 35.

¹⁹ See Herodotus 1.127-216 for details of this fatal and bloody campaign.

²⁰ Dandamaev *op. cit.* p. 129.

²¹ Herodotus iii. 92.

²² Achaemenid control of Khorezma is questioned by Helms *in op. cit.* p. 86 ff.

²³ Frye (1984) *op. cit.* p. 141.

²⁴ For the (clearly inflated) figures for the forces of both armies see for example, Arrian iii. 8.6, and Diodorus xvii. 53.3.

²⁵ See Herodotus iii. 117, for example.

also introduced writing and coinage to Bactria and Sogdia,⁷¹ and in turn adopted and sponsored Zoroastrianism (which, as suggested above, had originated in Central Asia, probably in Khorezmia or Margiana).⁷²

Alexander and the Macedonians

Some two centuries after the death of Cyrus, Alexander of Macedon crossed the Hindu Kush (called the 'Indian Caucasus' by Arrian)⁷³ in 329 BCE and entered Bactria in pursuit of Bessus, the former satrap of Bactria and murderer of Darius. As was shown in Chapter Four, Bessus' troops included armoured Saka cavalry divisions from both Bactria and Sogdia, but his substantial forces were unable to deter the Macedonians from their pursuit:

'Bessus did his utmost to prevent Alexander from advancing further. He had with him, besides the Persians who had taken part in the arrest of Darius, about 7,000 Bactrians and the Daei from the hither side of the Tanais (Syr Darya,⁷⁴ i.e. Sogdians), and with these troops he proceeded to lay waste the country around the foothills of the Caucasus, in the hope that if all crops and everything edible between Alexander and himself were destroyed, Alexander would be halted by sheer lack of supplies. The hope, however, was in vain. Alexander, in spite of everything, continued to advance'.⁷⁵

Bessus and his troops retreated to the north and crossed the Amu Darya in boats, which they then burned. Alexander led his forces north from Bactria⁷⁶ (which surrendered to him without resistance) and ingeniously crossed the Amu Darya on hide rafts.⁷⁷ Bessus was eventually surrendered to Alexander by his Sogdian ally Spitamenes, and the former satrap of Bactria was executed. Alexander then continued to campaign in Sogdia before returning to Bactria in the winter of 328/7. The following spring he departed for the Indus and quit Bactria for good, eventually returning to Babylon where he died in 323.

The significance of the Macedonian campaign in Bactria was cultural and economic rather than military, for following Alexander's death his fragile empire was quickly divided amongst three of his generals. However Alexander reinforced the process begun by the Achaemenids of effectively linking Central Asia to the civilisations of the Mediterranean, in particular introducing Greek populations and cultural traditions to Bactria. Alexander founded a substantial number of cities and military colonies in the region, most of them to the east of the Tigris where urban centres had hitherto been relatively unknown. Wallbank suggests that about a score of actual cities were founded by Alexander.⁷⁸ They served a variety of purposes – guarding strategic

⁷¹ M. A. Dandamaev, 'Media and Achaemenid Iran' in J. Harmatta, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* Vol. II (Paris 1994) pp. 47-8, 55.

⁷² M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* vol. 2 *Under the Achaemenids* (Leiden 1982) pp. 7-8, 41; also Heims *op. cit.*, pp. 77 ff.

⁷³ Arrian iii. 28, trans. de Selincourt (1971) *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁷⁴ On the Tanais being identified as the Jaxartes-Syr Darya, see Plutarch, *Alexander* 45.5; Strabo ii. 7.4.

⁷⁵ Arrian iii. 28, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁷⁶ Also called Zariaspa by Strabo (ii. 11.2), the modern Balkh.

⁷⁷ The use of hide boats to cross rivers was standard pastoralist procedure – it certainly was under the Mongols – suggesting that Alexander may have got the idea from pastoralist forces in his own army, or, more likely, he had observed during his campaign.

⁷⁸ W. Wallbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Oxford 1981) p. 43.

ports, passes and fords, and supervising wider territories. In addition to the actual cities, Strabo and Justin noted that there were even more unnamed military colonies established, populated by Greek mercenaries.⁹ Indeed Lam argues that it was the military colonies, more than the few named cities, which were responsible for the Hellenising of Bactria: 'the Greek settlement of Bactria was carried out principally by means of military colonies, and some of these places grew into cities though they retained their native names'.¹⁰

These newly-created towns and settlements stimulated trade, coinage and further urbanisation, as well as entrenching Greek culture in Bactria. Ai Khanoum is an example of one such settlement, founded (on the site of existing irrigation works) by Alexander in 328 on the southern side of the Amu Darya. Its function was originally military, designed to protect the fertile Amu Darya valley, but under the Seleucids it developed into a splendid metropolis influenced by Greek and local cultural customs in its construction, religion, language and lifestyle.¹¹

Clearly the bulk of settlers in Bactria were Greek mercenaries, but the evidence of the sources suggests that they were initially mostly reluctant colonists forced into settling a colony by Alexander and the Macedonian army. Griffith has estimated that during the course of his expedition into Central Asia, Alexander received up to 65,000 fresh mercenaries, and that he left behind some 36,000 of these as garrisons or settlers.¹² These mercenaries had come out to the east to make their fortune with Alexander's army, but in the main their fate was to be disarmed by the Macedonians and forced into the role of reluctant colonists, as Arrian suggests in a speech he put into the mouth of the Macedonia Coenus: 'Of the rest of the Greeks some have been settled in the cities which you founded, and they do not all remain there willingly'.¹³ Eventually, at Babylon, Alexander ordered that some 13,000 Macedonian infantry and 2000 cavalry be selected for retention in Asia, believing that his Asian conquests could be safeguarded by an army of moderate size because he had already founded so many colonies and cities throughout the region, and he garrisoned them with colonists he believed would be eager to maintain the Alexandrian 'empire'.¹⁴

However Alexander had seriously miscalculated the mood of the settlers, for even as he lay dying in Babylon word reached him of a revolt by the Bactrian colonists. Diodorus notes that the Greeks whom Alexander settled in Bactria were:

'sick for (of) Greek training and the Greek way of life, and having been relegated to the frontiers of the kingdom they put up with this from fear so long as Alexander was alive, but when he died they revolted'.¹⁵

Although many of the colonists did revolt and return home, many others remained, and their presence laid the foundations for the establishment and maintenance of

⁹ Strabo xi, 517, Justin xii, 13.

¹⁰ Lam *op. cit.* pp. 119-120.

¹¹ For a general introduction to Ai Khanoum see P. Bernard, 'An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia' 1982, reprinted in *Scientific American* (Special Issue 1994) 5(1) pp. 66-75.

¹² Cf. Griffith *Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge 1935) pp. 20 ff.

¹³ Arrian v, 27.

¹⁴ See Curtius x, 2, 8 for example.

¹⁵ Diodorus xviii, 7, 1.

Greek culture in Bactria, which remained independent until it was reconquered by Seleucus in c. 305.

The Seleucids

The fifty years following Alexander's death saw a protracted struggle between his leading generals, either to win overall power for themselves or to carve out their own separate kingdoms. Between 323 and 320, Alexander's senior cavalry officer (and probably his favourite) Perdiccas attempted to achieve a compromise with his rivals, that would leave supreme power in his hands. The proposed settlement would see Ptolemy (who was related to the royal house) take charge of Egypt; Antigonus (satrap of Phrygia) western Asia Minor; Lysimachus, Thrace; and Eumenes (Alexander's secretary and the only Greek amongst the contenders) Cappadocia and Paphlagonia, with Perdiccas in overall charge. However by 320 Perdiccas was dead, murdered in Egypt, after which Antigonus attempted to gain control of the entire empire. In Asia Antigonus eliminated Eumenes (in 316/5) and expelled Seleucus Nicator (who was the commander of the hypaspists, an elite guard's regiment) from Babylon. But then Ptolemy defeated Antigonus' son, and a peace settlement was agreed to in 311 with Lysimachus in control of Thrace, Ptolemy of Egypt and Antigonus of Asia.

Seleucus received nothing, although he had probably already begun attempting to regain control of the independent eastern satrapies (particularly Bactria) during the last decade of the fourth century. Antigonus assumed the kingship in 306, and Ptolemy declared himself king of Egypt the following year (305/4). That same year Seleucus must also have assumed the kingship of Asia, according to a cuneiform tablet containing a Babylonian king list of the Hellenistic period. Lines 6-7 (obv.) read:

'Year 7 (Seleucid era) which is [his] first year, Seleucus [ruled as] king. He reigned 25 years. Year 31 (Seleucid era) month 6, [Seleucus] the king was killed in the land [of the] Khani'.³⁶

As Wallbank observes, this text makes it clear that the first regnal year of Seleucus (305/4) was in fact the seventh year of the Seleucid era, which therefore began in 312 or 311.³⁷ Seleucus immediately set about regaining control of the eastern regions of the former Alexandrian empire, and by 305 had reached the Indus. But this brought him into direct conflict with the new power in the Punjab, Chandragupta of the Mauryan dynasty, who had risen to prominence in c. 322. After seizing Magadha, Chandragupta had advanced on the Punjab and annexed the territories of local rulers weakened by Alexander's campaigns. By 313 he had conquered much of central India as well, and his extensive empire was thus achieved exclusively through force of arms. Seleucus I confronted Chandragupta in 305 and 304, but by 303 had been defeated by the Indian and compelled to withdraw. According to Strabo, Seleucus (in exchange for 500 fighting elephants, which added considerably to his forces) ceded Aria, Arachosia and the Paropamisadae (Gandhara) – i.e. the regions around modern Herat, Kandahar and Kabul respectively – and possibly part of Gedrosia (Baluchistan)

³⁶ See A.J. Sachs and D.J. Wiseman, 'A Babylonian King List of the Hellenistic Period', *Iraq* 16 (1954) pp. 202-17.

³⁷ Wallbank *op. cit.* p. 56. The Seleucid era began in October 312 in the Greek reckoning, but in the Babylonian

as well. 'Seleucus gave them to Sandracottus (Chandragupta) on terms of intermarriage and receiving in exchange five hundred elephants'.³⁸

Despite the loss of the 'far east', Seleucus I and his successor Antiochus I continued to expand the Seleucid Empire, adding much of Syria, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. But the boundaries of the Seleucid realm fluctuated wildly, so that by 129 it had shrunk to a small area of northern Syria. However, the founding by the Seleucids of a string of new Greek cities extending into Bactria and Sogdiana is an undeniably striking achievement of the dynasty. Most of this colonising work was carried out by the first three Seleucid kings – Seleucus I (312–281), Antiochus I (281–261) and Antiochus II (261–246). The new cities became further instruments of Hellenisation and helped spread Greek culture into present-day Afghanistan and India. The bulk of Greek colonists who populated the new cities migrated into Asia Minor and northern Syria. But Greeks were also found in large numbers in Bactria, which ensured the continuation of Hellenistic culture even after the Seleucids lost control of that region when the satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana, Demetrius, seized power in c. 250 BCE and established the independent Greco-Bactrian state.

The Greco-Bactrians

By the middle of the third century, then, there were a significant number of Greeks settled in Bactria. At the very least, as noted above, Alexander had left a substantial force of mercenaries in his Bactrian and Sogdian satrapies and had founded up to twelve military colonies. The early Seleucid monarchs encouraged settlement, and Bactria soon changed from a territory containing almost no urban centres to a region of so many cities and towns that, as Tam puts it, its level of urbanisation became almost a proverb.³⁹ Hence by the time Diodotus achieved independence from the Seleucids – assumed the 'royal title' according to the epitome of Justin⁴⁰ – he would have done so as the head of a considerable Greco-Bactrian population.

Textual evidence for the founding of the independent Greek kingdom of Bactria is fragmentary and confused. The reference in Justin's epitome comes in a passage describing the rise of Parthia: 'At the same period, also, Theodotus (*a mistake for Diodotus*) governor of the thousand cities of Bactria, revolted and assumed the title of king'.⁴¹ The Justin epitome goes on to say that after this event, Arsaces assumed control of Parthia, and that later Diodotus died and the Parthians went on to make peace with his successor. Strabo confirms the early sequence with the statement that: 'those who had been entrusted with their government first caused the revolt of Bactriana and of all the country near it ... and then Arsaces ... invaded Parthia'.⁴²

Although the chronology of Parthian independence is almost as clouded as that of Bactrian, the 'Parthian Era' is generally understood to have begun in 248 B.C.,⁴³ which thus allows for a generalised but reasonably accurate date of c. 250 for the

³⁸ Strabo xv. 2. 9.

³⁹ Tam *op. cit.* p. 72.

⁴⁰ Justin xli. 4, 5 and 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* xli. 4.

⁴² Strabo xv. 2.

⁴³ Cf. Smith, *Asiatic Discoveries* (London 1875) p. 38. * discovery of a double dated tablet.

which confirmed these dates.

commencement of Bactrian independence.⁴¹ Tarn argued that there was no sudden revolt, but rather a gradual rise to power and independence by Diodotus,⁴² but Narain disagreed and suggested that the breakaway of Diodotus probably was abrupt because, as Justin clearly indicates, it was a simple revolt with no special features to distinguish it from the similar rebellions of governors of outlying provinces.⁴³

It is the abundant but ambiguous numismatic evidence that is vital to determining the sequence of Greco-Bactrian kings. It could be argued that once Diodotus had revolted from Antiochus II (who died in 247, providing another *terminus post quem* to the chronology of the revolt), he immediately issued coins in his own name as a mark of his independence (having previously already substituted his own head for that of Antiochus even while still a Seleucid satrap). However, more recently both Kovalenko and Holt have argued from die studies that only with the accession of Diodotus II was the king's own name introduced onto the coinage.⁴⁴ Diodotus (I or II?) was portrayed wearing the royal diadem on the obverse, with a portrait of Zeus hurling his thunderbolt on the reverse, and the Greek inscription 'of king Diodotus'.⁴⁵ This was the first of a lengthy series of coins to be issued by independent Greek kings in Central Asia and northwest India down to the early first century CE.⁴⁶

Diodotus was succeeded by his son Diodotus II who may have ruled for perhaps fifteen years (although there is no evidence about how long Diodotus I and II, Euthydemus or indeed any of the Bactrian kings ruled). According to Strabo and the epitome of Justin, the Parthians formed an alliance with Diodotus II, who was then able to consolidate his power so that any attempt by Antiochus III to regain the lost satrapy for the Seleucids was now out of the question. However sometime between 235 and 230, Diodotus II was murdered (according to Polybius)⁴⁷ by Euthydemus I. Euthydemus was probably a nobleman of Bactria and may even have been a brother of Diodotus, although this is speculative, and Tarn's reconstruction suggested that he was acting both in the interests of the Greek population of Bactria (who would not have appreciated Diodotus II's alliance with the Parthians) and of the Seleucids, in that according to Polybius he later told Antiochus III that he was not a rebel, but had in fact killed the son of a rebel.⁴⁸ That aside, from his seizure of the Bactrian throne sometime after 235 until 208 when Antiochus III marched against him, we know almost nothing of the career of Euthydemus I.

⁴¹ See Tarn *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4; and Narain (1957, reprint 1980) *op. cit.*, p. 13 for detailed discussions of chronology.

⁴² Tarn *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3.

⁴³ Narain (1957/80) *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴ S. Kovalenko, 'The Coinage of Diodotus I and Diodotus II, Greek Kings of Bactria', *Silk Roads Art and Archaeology* 4 (1995/96), pp. 17-24, and E. Holt, 'The Euthydemid Coinage of Bactria', *Revue Numismatique* (1981), 17 nos. 129 and 130.

⁴⁵ See for example silver tetradrachm BAFc Diodotus 3; BN Diodotus 6B.

⁴⁶ For a brief but excellent recent introduction to the coinage of the Graeco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks see I. Farrington and J. Crook, eds, *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan* (London 1990) pp. 60-63.

⁴⁷ Polybius xi, 34, 9.

⁴⁸ Tarn *op. cit.*, p. 74; Polybius xi, 34, 2.

Antiochus III's campaign against Euthydemus I is described in vivid detail by Polybius, however, including the two-year siege of Bactra.⁵³ Eventually, with no end in sight, both parties realised it was to their advantage to end the stalemate, and Euthydemus I skillfully employed a fellow Bactrian named Teltas to negotiate a settlement with Antiochus. The Bactrians emphasised the imminent danger to both parties posed by nearby hordes of nomads (Sakas?):

After speaking at some length in the same sense, he (Euthydemus) begged Teltas to mediate between them in a friendly manner and bring about a reconciliation, entreating Antiochus not to begrudge him the name and state of a king as, if he did not yield to this request, neither of them would be safe. For considerable hordes of nomads were approaching, and this was not only a great danger to both of them, but if they consented to admit them, the country would certainly relapse into barbarism.⁵⁴

In the settlement that followed Antiochus' apparent acceptance of the potential danger posed by the nomad threat, he agreed to allow his daughter to marry Demetrius, a son of Euthydemus. In addition, the latter gave up a significant force of fighting elephants to Antiochus, and may also have been forced to re-acknowledged Seleucid suzerainty over Bactria. Certainly Tarn thought so: 'as the first overtures toward peace came from him (Euthydemus), and he surrendered his elephants, probably he did, though it soon became a dead letter'.⁵⁴ So much so in fact that, after the departure of Antiochus, Euthydemus I may actually have expanded Bactrian possessions into Parthia from c. 206,⁵⁵ before his death in perhaps 190 BCE.⁵⁶

Euthydemus was succeeded by his son Demetrius who continued to expand Bactrian interests, gaining control over Aria and Arachosia in the south and east. Isidore of Charax mentions the city of 'Demetrius' in Arachosia⁵⁷ – and perhaps also conquering areas to the north and east of Sogdia, possibly including parts of Ferghana. Certainly Strabo quotes Apollodoros as claiming that the Greeks 'extended their empire even as far as the Seres (China?)'.⁵⁸ but while both Tarn and Narain were somewhat imaginatively prepared to accept the possibility of Greek rule (albeit briefly) in Ferghana, neither really imagines direct contact between the Greeks and Chinese.⁵⁹

It is also possible that it was Demetrius who crossed the Hindu Kush and first extended Greek rule into Kabul and the Indus Valley, although Narain has disputed this.⁶⁰ Certainly Demetrius issued a striking series of silver tetradrachms which depicted his bust wearing an elephant scalp and royal diadem on the obverse, and with Heracles on the reverse carrying club and lion skin, with the Greek inscription 'of

⁵³ Brian Kritt has argued that certain coins issued by Antiochus III may have been minted at Ar Khanoum, suggesting that Antiochus may have captured that city from Euthydemus I. See B. Kritt, 'Dynastic Transitions in the Coinage of Bactria: Antiochus – Diodotus – Euthydemus', *Classical Numismatic Studies No. 4* (Lancaster, PA: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc, 2001) p. 161; see also J.D. Fernal, review of Matek J. Olbrycht's 'Parthia et ulteriore gentes: Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen dem arsakidischen Iran und den Nomaden der eurasischen Steppen', in *Archaeologische Mitteilungen Aus Iran und Turan* (Band 34, 2002) pp. 465-469.

⁵⁴ Polybius xi, 39, 6-14.

⁵⁵ *Ian op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵⁶ Strabo xi, 7.3; xi, 1, 2-3.

⁵⁷ Tarn says 189 BCE *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵⁸ Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* by Isidore of Charax trans. W.H. Schoff (Chicago 1989) pp. 80f.

⁵⁹ Strabo xi, 11.1.

⁶⁰ *Ian op. cit.* pp. 83-87; Narain (1957-1980) *op. cit.* p. 27.

⁶¹ *Ian op. cit.*, Ch. IV, pp. 129 ff; Narain (1957-80).

King Demetrius'.⁶¹ However, the elephant headdress type can be variously interpreted. On the one hand, MacDowall has argued that as he wears an elephant headdress on all his silver coins, he probably conquered India as his father's commander before his own accession.⁶² Alternatively, Joe Cribb suggests that the elephant headdress could equally be interpreted as a reference to Alexander the Great (who also chose to be depicted with this crown), rather than as evidence of a conquest of India.⁶³ If one interprets the elephant scalp headdress as suggesting an Indian conquest, the implication is that from soon after 190 BCE the focus of Greek interest in the region seemed to shift to south of the Hindu Kush. However, against this interpretation is the fact that over the last two hundred years only one copper coin of Demetrius has been documented from finds south of the Hindu Kush.⁶⁴ Demetrius was succeeded by Euthydemus II, Pantaleon, Agathocles and Apollodotus I, some of whom also issued bilingual coins, obviously intended for use by their Indian-speaking subjects and circulated in the Indian parts of their realms. The issues of Pantaleon and Agathocles are the earliest of these bilingual coins, being inscribed in both Greek and Prakrit (inscribed in Brahmi script initially, and later in Kharoshthi by Apollodotus, see below).⁶⁵

The last Greek king to rule both north and south of the Hindu Kush was Eucratides the Great (c.170-145).⁶⁶ Justin's epitome provides information on both the chronology and career of Eucratides, describing him as a contemporary of the Arsacid Parthian Mithridates I (who came to the throne in c. 170, see below).⁶⁷ Eucratides may have been related to the Seleucid family of Antiochus IV,⁶⁸ and sent to Bactria by the Seleucid monarch to restore Seleucid power there.⁶⁹ Eucratides revived Greek power in Bactria by campaigning in Sogdia, Aria, Arachosia and Drangiana. As will be shown below, Eucratides may have also been forced into conflict with Mithridates and the Parthians in c. 155, but was still able to renew the Greek hold upon the western reaches of the former Bactrian realm. Eucratides issued an extensive and superb series of coins during his long reign, usually with his bust on the obverse wearing a helmet decorated with a bull's ears and horns. On the reverse his coins depicted a type which, as Bopearachchi and ur Rahman have noted, was 'so far unattested in the Bactrian coinage: heavenly twins, Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri (sons of Zeus) either on horse-back holding palms and spears, prancing to right or standing facing, each holding a spear'.⁷⁰

After a period of consolidation in Bactria, Eucratides attempted to invade 'India' (the Paropamisadae and Gandhara) sometime between 165 and 160, a campaign that Tarn

⁶¹ See for example silver tetradrachm, BMC Demetrius 2, BN Demetrius 11C.

⁶² D. MacDowall (Oct. 2002) private correspondence.

⁶³ J. Cribb (Nov. 2002) private correspondence.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Errington and Cribb *op. cit.*, p. 62; eg bronze coin of Agathocles, BN Agathocles 10A.

⁶⁶ Tarn suggests he came to the throne in 169, *op. cit.*, p. 198; Narain argued for 169 in (1957-1980) *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁶⁷ Justin XI, 6.

⁶⁸ First cousin according to Tarn's speculation, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁶⁹ Narain - equally imaginative reconstruction argues that Eucratides was a rebel who rose to power with a handful of men, and that by continuous adventurous campaigning was able to win the throne of Bactria and India from Demetrius II (c. 175-170) *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bopearachchi and A. ur Rahman, *Pre-Kushan Coins in Pakistan: Pre-Kushan Coins in Pakistan* (Karachi 1995) p. 30. BMC Eucratides II, BN Eucratides II.

describes as his 'undoing'.⁷¹ Eucratides' second issue of silver tetradrachms, which was probably introduced when he first campaigned in India, depict him helmeted with the title *Megas* ('Great'). As MacDowall has pointed out, this must have been before 162 BCE because the type was subsequently copied by Timarchus, the satrap of Media, who revolted against the Seleucid king in that same year.⁷² Naran imagines that Eucratides' motive was ambition pure and simple: 'he aspired to become a great king and to outshine the achievements of all his predecessors'.⁷³ India may have been under the rule of King Apollodotus (r. c. 180-160?), one of the successors of Demetrius, when Eucratides set off on his Indian campaign. It may have been Apollodotus who first used the Kharoshthi script on the reverses of his bilingual coins, translating the Greek inscription on the obverses.⁷⁴

Eucratides enjoyed only limited success in Gandhara where his coinage is rare: Marshall was not convinced that he ever crossed the Indus.⁷⁵ If he did, the campaign would have been long and arduous, and every step would have taken Eucratides further from his power base in Bactria. Apollodotus had been succeeded (during the course of the Eucratidean invasion) by Menander I (r. c. 155-130?) the greatest of all the Indo-Greek kings.⁷⁶ Menander's importance as a figure of world-historical significance is attested by the fact that he made an identifiable appearance in both Indian literature (described as a great defender of Buddhism) and classical literature (described as the conqueror of India); and that he issued the greatest number of Indo-Greek coins and the greatest number of dies and series. Menander was able to confront Eucratides with the support of large elements of the native population, and eventually Eucratides was probably forced to negotiate a treaty with Menander and, according to Justin's epitome, return to Bactria.

The return journey can be dated only approximately to c. 150-145,⁷⁸ and if the ambiguous evidence of Justin is to be believed, Eucratides was murdered by one of his sons, either Heliocles I or Plato (although the evidence identifying Heliocles as the eldest son of Eucratides is tenuous in the extreme). The sack of Ai Khanoum (see below) can be dated by the discovery in the excavations of an inscribed pot of the Year 24 from the destruction level of the Treasury. As MacDowall points out, this 'must be a regnal year (or possibly era) of Eucratides, giving a date of c. 145'.⁷⁹ Arguably it might have been a serious incursion of nomads into Bactria around this time that made Eucratides hasten back from India. Thereafter the slender thread of textual evidence breaks off, and the story of the last phase of Greek power in Bactria becomes even more difficult to reconstruct.

⁷¹ *Tam op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁷² MacDowall (October 2002) private correspondence.

⁷³ *Naran op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ *IG BMC* Apollodotus 16B, *BN* Apollodotus 16B; also Errington and Cribb *op. cit.*, p. 61, No. 22.

⁷⁵ See J. Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 1951) p. 31.

⁷⁶ Although only seven Indo-Greek kings are named in the classical sources – Diodotus I and II, Euthydemus, Demetrius I and II, Apollodotus I and Menander I – Bopearachchi (amongst others) has used numismatic evidence to compile an extensive list of forty-four Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings; see for example Bopearachchi and in Rahm.

⁷⁷ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995) 101-102.

⁷⁸ *Naran* argues for 155 in *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁷⁹ MacDowall (October 2002) private correspondence.

The numismatic evidence might be interpreted as suggesting that with the death of Eueratides, by 145 the Greco-Bactrian realm was divided into a series of regions administered by kings of vastly reduced power to that of Eueratides. One of the regions was probably from north of the Hindu Kush to the Amu Darya, with Bactra functioning as its 'capital'. This less formidable Bactrian kingdom now became of increasing interest to Mithridates and the Parthians, and Eueratides' eldest son, Heliocles, may have forced to confront them. However, as Cribb has pointed out, everything we know about Heliocles is derived from his coinage, and it is unclear from that evidence exactly where or even when he ruled. Clearly he was a successor to Eueratides in that his coins post-date the issues of Eueratides, but they have only been found in southern Bactria in any quantity.¹⁰

Indeed, with an absence of textual information coins offer the only real hope for any sort of reconstruction of the last few years of Bactrian political history before the arrival of the Yuezhi north of the Amu Darya in c. 130. A study of numismatic evidence from Ai Khanoum by Bopearachechi indirectly offers a plausible account of the probable course of events, despite the fact that Bopearachechi attributes the destruction of Ai Khanoum to the Yuezhi, rather than to the alternative 'conquerors' and destroyers of the last vestiges of Greek power in Bactria, the Sakas (as will be argued below). Bopearachechi notes that the Greek silver coins found at Ai Khanoum stop suddenly with the issues of Eueratides I,¹¹ and hence the occupation of that Greek city on the Oxus by nomads must be dated to c. 145:

'Far from being a chance coincidence, the fact that the issues stop with Eueratides I's reign is surely explained by one event, the nature of which becomes clear through the excavation: a sudden catastrophe which struck the city, burning down the palace bringing the existence of the city to an end. It is quite likely that the destruction of the Greek city of Ai Khanoum was the result of a first attack on the Greco-Bactrian kingdom by the nomads, and that this event would have taken place immediately after the assassination of Eueratides by his son around 145 BCE'.¹²

Bopearachechi also nominates Heliocles I as the last Greek king to reign in Bactria (although see MacDowall below in fn. 81), for thereafter no Greek kings ruled north of the Hindu Kush, and any coins of those later kings that circulated in Bactria must therefore have been used as currency for commercial exchanges with Bactria, or as tribute paid to their new militarised neighbours (the post-145 conquerors of Bactria) who were also used to the Attic coinage standard. Cribb, however, has argued that the reign of Heliocles may well have stretched into the first century, which indicates that

¹⁰ Cribb (November 2002) private correspondence.

¹¹ MacDowall has argued that while the copper coinage found in the excavations of Ai Khanoum certainly stopped with Eueratides I (see P. Bernard, *MIAT I-VI/III* (1985) *Fouilles d'Ai Khanoum et les monnaies de ces rois*, pp. 51-75), Bopearachechi's claim that the silver coinage at Ai Khanoum also stops is wrong. One of the two silver hoards found at Ai Khanoum contains a silver tetradrachm of the later king Eueratides II, and in addition later silver tetradrachms are known for Heliocles, Plato, Eueratides II and Demetrius II, who were presumably rulers of more restricted parts of Bactria, in MacDowall, October 2002, private correspondence.

¹² Bopearachechi, 'Recent Coin Hoard Evidence on Pre-Kushana Chronology' in M. Alram and D. L. Bivar (eds.), *Coins, Art and Archaeology: Essays on the pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Iranian Region* (Vienna, 1986) p. 114, however, for a contra argument see G. Rapin, *La monnaie grecque d'Afghanistan* (Paris, 1990) p. 107, and *La monnaie grecque d'Afghanistan, IV. Fouilles d'Ai Khanoum* (Paris, 1994) pp. 14-15 and 78-79.

in certain pockets of Bactria at least, Greek rule remained in force even after the nomad invaders had sacked Ai Khanoum.⁷⁷

Both Bopearachchi and Cribb offer persuasive numismatic reconstruction of the ultimate fate of Greco-Bactria. But whether the reign of Heliocles continued into the first century or not, with the murder of Eueratides by his son Greek power clearly suffered a substantial and irreversible decline in Bactria. The Saka hordes that had so troubled Seleucid, Parthian and Bactrian kings alike (as will be shown below) apparently seized their chance and raided across the Amu Darya from their base in northern Bactria, burning, looting and then occupying parts of Bactria proper as far south as the Hindu Kush. Greek kingdoms south of the Hindu Kush (and any remnants remaining to the north) may have been forced to pay tribute to the Sakas, although the latter were clearly prepared to allow commercial exchanges and mercantile activity to continue within the region, as the evidence of Zhang Qian will show below. This remained the situation for a decade and a half until 130 when the Yuezhi confederation arrived in northern Bactria from Kangju-Sogdiana, and defeated and evicted the Saka occupiers. Supporting evidence for this reconstructed course of events is found in textual references to the activity and role of these restive Sakan groups in the region during the second half of the second century.

The Sakas in Bactria and Parthia

The Yuezhi's apparent defeat and eviction of the Sakan occupiers of northern Bactria is confusingly bound up with the general question of the destruction of the Greco-Bactrian state. One therefore needs to differentiate clearly between the role played by other semi-nomadic tribal groupings (predominantly various groups of Sakas) in the earlier (c. 145-140?) overthrow of remnant Greek power, and that played fifteen years later by the Yuezhi invaders of northern Bactria.

It will be recalled from Chapter Three that classical sources identified at least three different groups of Sakas (or Indo-Iranian-speaking 'Scythians') in Inner Asia – the *Saka Tayany paradraya* of the Black Sea region, well-known to Herodotus; the *Saka Hamanavarga* (Amyrgian Sakas), elements of which the Yuezhi encountered in the Ysyk Kul region and Ferghana; and the *Tigrayanda*, located by Ptolemy (or rather Ptolemy's source, Maes Titianus) as living 'south of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya)'.⁷⁸ The latter might represent Amyrgians driven to the Syr Darya region by the migrating Yuezhi, but are more likely to have been groups of *Tayany paradraya* that had spread out from their original Black Sea homeland to settle along the shores of both the Caspian and Aral Seas (as will be shown below). These latter groups played a significant role in the political history of both Bactria and Parthia in the decades preceding the Yuezhi's arrival in the region. Evidence of their impact is to be found in several classical sources, particularly Justin's epitome, Ptolemy, Diodorus and Strabo.

One of the most significant rulers of Central Asia during the second century BCE was Mithridates I of Parthia (c. 170-138/7), a near contemporary of Eueratides I and a king whose impact was felt in Republican Rome, as numerous sources attest. An account of his affairs in the eastern provinces of the Parthian realm is more difficult to

⁷⁷ Joe Cribb (April 2002) private correspondence.

⁷⁸ Ptolemy vi.14, 14.

determine, however. Although the details of his reign are largely beyond the parameters of this book, what is particularly relevant is that, as shown above, under his leadership the Parthian realm possibly expanded to include, for a brief period, Bactria. The principal source for this possibility is the epitome of Justin: 'the Bactrians, harrassed with various wars, lost not only their dominions but their liberty: they were at last overcome, as if exhausted, by the weaker Parthians'.⁸⁷

Although the less powerful of the two states in the recent past perhaps, once Mithridates had succeeded to the throne it was no longer possible to consider Parthia weak. None the less, if the Parthians had indeed occupied parts of Bactria, they may have been forced by Eucratides to relinquish this by c. 155, allowing the Greeks to renew their hold upon the region. Tam (also Herzfeld and Thomas, and more tentatively Senior) suggested that during this same period Mithridates may have settled several Saka groups on the lower Helmand River in a province later called Sacastan ('Sakastan', present-day Sistan Province in eastern Iran)⁸⁸ or rather that 'as is much more probable, they settled themselves: he probably had ... little choice in the matter'.⁸⁷ But there is no mention in the sources of Mithridates having any dealings with Sakas until a decade and a half later, so this was simply speculation on Tam's part. Gardiner-Garden suggests that the settlement of Sacastan may actually have occurred during the reign of Mithridates II (123-88/87 BCE).⁸⁸

A more reliable date for Parthian involvement with the Sakas is 141 BCE. In that year Mithridates I was far to the west, campaigning against the Seleucids in lower Mesopotamia, but with victory in his grasp Justin's epitome suggests that the Parthian king was forced to return abruptly to Hyrcania to deal with some unexplained problem.⁸⁹ Debevoise believed that:

'The cause of his departure from Mesopotamia at this critical juncture in his campaign was probably a raid by the Sacae, who shortly before 165 had been forced from their homeland in Turkestan by the Yueh-chi and by this time were certainly close to the eastern borders of Parthia'.⁹⁰

Debevoise's chronology is incorrect. The Yuezhi did not leave the Gansu until 162 and spent the next three decades in the Ili Basin before entering Ferghana and Sogdiana late in the 130s. None the less, his observation that by 141 groups of Sakas were harassing the northeastern Parthian (and presumably northwestern Bactrian) borders indicates at the very least their restive presence in the region. Of course, as Gardiner-Garden points out, there is no actual textual naming of the Sakas in the context of this event, and 'there are many other affairs that might have brought the King back'.⁹¹ But the possibility that Mithridates probably did come into contact with Sakas is strengthened by comments in Justin's epitome and also Orosius concerning the

⁸⁷ Justin xli vi.

⁸⁸ See particularly Herzfeld (1932) *op. cit.*, pp. 1-116. F.W. Thomas, 'Sakastana: Where Dwelt the Sakas named by Darius and Herodotus?', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906) pp. 181-200, 460-464, argued that Sacastan was actually settled by Sakas as early as the sixth century BCE, but this was thoroughly refuted by P. Darlino in *L'immigrazione dei Sakas nella Drangiana* (Roma 1967); see also Senior (2001) *op. cit.* vol I, p. 11.

⁸⁹ Tam *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁹⁰ Gardiner-Garden (1987) *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹¹ Justin xli, vi, 6-8.

⁹² N.C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago 1938; New York 1968) p. 24.

⁹³ Gardiner-Garden *op. cit.*, p. 31.

extension of Parthian control into areas contiguous to the 'Sakan realms'.⁹⁰ It is at least a possibility that it was sometime during this same period of restive activity that Saka groups may have crossed the Amu Darya and effected the destruction of Ai Khanoum, as was suggested above.

Mitridates was succeeded in 138 or 137 BCE by his son Phraates II (138/7-128 BCE). Initially Phraates suffered defeats in Mesopotamia (including the loss of Babylon) before restoring Parthian fortunes with a devastating victory over the Seleucid king Antiochus VII.⁹¹ However, in a crisis similar to that faced by his father, in the midst of a campaign in Syria Phraates was suddenly forced to return to the eastern regions of his realm to defend them against a concerted attack by Sakas. Agam Justin's epitome provides the only extant account:

'having proceeded to make war upon Syria' . . . (Phraates) was recalled, by hostilities on the part of the Scythians, to defend his own country. For the Scythians, having been induced, by the offer of pay, to assist the Parthians against Antiochus, king of Syria, and not having arrived until the war had ended, were disappointed of the expected remuneration . . . in discontent at having made so long a march in vain they began to ravage the country of the Parthians'.⁹²

Certain scholars have interpreted these remarks literally – that Phraates summoned the Sakas, but when they arrived too late and received no compensation, they began to ravage Parthia.⁹³ Others have suggested that the Sakas had entered Parthia uninvited, and that Phraates tried to 'buy them off' by offering mercenary service.⁹⁴ According to Justin's epitome, Phraates took a body of Greek soldiers (who had been fighting with Antiochus before coming over to the Parthian side) with him to meet the Sakas. In the ensuing battle the Greeks defected again, this time to the Sakas, and the army of Phraates (and indeed the king himself) was destroyed.⁹⁵

A possible inference to be drawn from this fragmentary but tantalizing evidence is that from at least the late 140s (and perhaps as early as 155 BCE) until the arrival of the Yuezhi in northern Bactria in 130, militarised Saka groups were extremely restive in the borderlands of Bactria and Parthia, causing considerable consternation to at least two Parthian (and presumably one Bactrian, Heliocles) monarchs. Then, after a decade of textual silence (mid-130s to mid-120s), the Sakas reentered Parthian political history during the reign of Artabanos II (128-124/3 BCE).⁹⁶ John of Antioch reports that the Parthians were forced to accept tributary status to the obviously more powerful Sakas, although this did not continue for long, perhaps because the era of Sakan hegemony in Bactria (north of the Hindu Kush at least) had by then been ended

⁹⁰ Justin xlii.1.8; and Orosius v. iv.16 for example.

⁹¹ See Justin xlii.1; Diodorus xxxiv.16-17 for details.

⁹² Justin xlii.1.

⁹³ See for example F. Altheim, *Weltgeschichte Asiens im griechischen Zeitalter II* (1947) p. 99; K. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der Parthischen Geschichte* (Darmstadt 1986) p. 28; D. Bivar, 'The political history of Iran under the Arsacids' (1983) pp. 38-39.

⁹⁴ Debevoise *op. cit.*, p. 36 for example. Senior believes that a particular coin in his collection may have been struck by Phraates as part of the payment to the Scythians for mercenaries. See Senior (2001) *op. cit.* vol. 2, p. 225, coin F.3.

⁹⁵ Justin xlii.1.5; see also Diodorus xxxiv.21 on the submission of the Greeks.

⁹⁶ Senior suggests that Artabanos may have temporarily accepted Sakan overlordship, but was later killed by a poisoned Sakan arrow (2001) *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 12.

by the Yuezhi.¹⁰⁰ The long reign of Mithridates II (123–88–87–80 B.C.) was also punctuated by numerous wars against the Sakas, including (perhaps) the attempt to resettle certain Saka tribes along the lower Helmand in Sacastan noted above, arguably further evidence of their expulsion from Bactrian regions to the north by the Yuezhi. The epitome of Justin also implies that Mithridates II probably extended Parthian rule over Saka tribes in Drangiana and the Punjab, regions to which they had possibly been forced to migrate following their eviction from Bactria by the Yuezhi.¹⁰¹

One possible conclusion to be drawn from all this is that it is the Sakas who should be credited with the overthrow (or at least the terminal disruption) of Greek rule in Bactria. They were the only substantial militarised 'nomadic' federation specifically named by the sources as being active in the region at that time, and had a recent history of military intervention in the affairs of both Parthia and Bactria. The Yuezhi did not arrive in northern Bactria until 130, and as the numismatic and archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the Greek state of Bactria had been severely weakened in the decade or so prior, it is the Sakas who perhaps should be credited with the initial overthrow of Greco-Bactria.¹⁰² Support for this conclusion is to be found in the classical source descriptions of the ultimate fate of Bactrian Greek power.

The Overthrow of the Greco-Bactrians

The textual evidence for the overthrow of the Greco-Bactrian state is rendered no less confusing or ambiguous by this interpretation, although the key role of the Sakas is clearly highlighted. The crucial references are from Strabo and the anonymous prologues of Pompeius Trogus (or rather from Apollodoros of Artemita, the probable source for both Strabo and Trogus).¹⁰³ These references have been debated for at least a century, but if considered in the light of the history of Saka activity and involvement outlined above appear to offer a reasonably coherent account of the destruction of the last substantial vestiges of Greek power in Central Asia. Strabo wrote, in a general discussion of the Scythian 'peoples':

'But the best known of the nomads are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks, I mean the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari and Sacarauli, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) that adjoins that of the Sacae and the Sogdiani and was occupied by the Sacae'.¹⁰⁴

Later he added:

'The Sacae, however, made raids like those of the Cimmerians and Treres, some into the regions close to their own country, others into regions far away. For instance they occupied Bactriana'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ See Gardiner-Garden's translation of John of Antioch *op. cit.*, p. 33, and n. 134, Justin xlii.ii.

¹⁰¹ Justin xlii.ii.

¹⁰² Senior has also argued that political weakness in Bactria and then Parthia allowed the Sakas to occupy Merv and Northern Bactria between c. 160 and 150 B.C.E., and then to interfere with Parthian affairs from c. 140 onwards, in Senior (2001) *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 12.

¹⁰³ See Gardiner-Garden, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–10.

¹⁰⁴ Strabo xviii.2. Trans. of Strabo and Trogus from Gardiner-Garden *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Strabo xviii.2. Trans. of Strabo and Trogus from Gardiner-Garden *op. cit.*, pp. 128–9.

¹⁰⁶ Strabo xviii.4.

The anonymous Prologue to Pomponius Trogus' Book XI I, in a discussion of Bactria under the rule of Diodotus, states:

... et ceteros exinde Scythicos gentes, Bactrianos et Asiam Bactra occupatam et Sogdianos.

(Since then it has been ruled by Scythian people, the Sarmatiae and the Asiani who occupied Bactria and Sogdiana.)

Later in XI I Trogus' Prologue adds:

... Hittae, hec res Scythiae, Reges Tocharorum, Asiam interitumque Sarmatarum.

(Added to this is the history of the Scythians. The Asiani (became) kings of the Tochari (or Tochari the annihilation of the Sarmatae (or, and the Sarmatae are annihilated).¹⁰⁶

The 'nomadic' groups named in both Strabo and Trogus are clearly very similar (incidentally strengthening Gardiner-Garden's claim of a common source for both). As early as 1917 Charpentier (based on Valliant's original emendation) argued for a reduction of Strabo's catalogue of four tribes to three – the Asioi, Tochari and Sacarauoi – which brought the two accounts even closer into alignment. Haloun and Bachhofer later agreed with Charpentier's reduction.¹⁰⁷ Attempts to positively identify these three groups have occupied scholars since the eighteenth century.

Asioi

The Asioi have been variously identified with the Wusun (by de Guignes, Kingsmill, Sieg and Thomsen, for example),¹⁰⁸ the Kushans (by Fleet, Haloun, Bachhofer, Maenchen-Helfen and Eggermont, for example);¹⁰⁹ and the Yuezhi (by Gutschmid, Haloun, Haneda and also Iam, who later expressed doubts).¹¹⁰ But these identifications have been motivated by a desire to read Trogus' relevant phrase as the Asiani *being* (or *becoming*) kings of the Tocharoi, i.e. a group from either outside (the Wusun) or inside (the Kueizhuang = Kushan yabghu) the nomadic confederation of the Tocharoi (Tocharians = Yuezhi) becoming kings/rulers of that Yuezhi-Tocharian

¹⁰⁶ Pomp. Trog. Prolog. xli.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ J. Charpentier, 'Die ethnographische Stellung der Tocharer', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (= ZDMG) (1917) pp. 266-370; Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, p. 244-5; Bachhofer, 'On Greeks and Sakas in India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* LXI (1941) pp. 243-4.

¹⁰⁹ M. de Guignes, *Histoire générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols, et des autres Tartares occidentaux* (Paris 1756) I p. 26; T.W. Kingsmill, 'Ancient Tibet and its Frontages', *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* XXVII (1906) p. 36, 1. Sieg, 'Ein einheimischer Name für Toxi', *Nutzungsberichte der Berlinische Akademie der Wissenschaft* (1918) pp. 560 ff.; V. Thomsen, *Inscriptiones de Turkistan chiffrées* (Heisingfors 1896) pp. 115-6.

¹¹⁰ F. Fleet, 'The name Kushan', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1914) pp. 1000-11; Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, p. 253; Bachhofer (1941) *op. cit.*, pp. 246-7; O. Maenchen-Helfen, 'The Yueh-chih problem re-examined', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1945) pp. 71-81; P.B.L. Eggermont, 'The Historia Philippica of Pomponius Trogus and the foundation of the Scythian Empire', in A.L. Hasham, ed., *Papers on the date of Kaniska* (Leiden 1968) p. 367.

¹¹¹ A. Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans* (Tübingen 1888) p. 71; Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, p. 317; T. Haneda, 'A propos des Ya Yue-tche et des Kouei-chouang', *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise, Série française* IV (1933) pp. 35-38; Iam (1938, 1951) *op. cit.*, pp. 284, 533.

confederation. However, as Narain and others have pointed out, the meaning of Trogus' second comment is enigmatic, both because it is not clear whether *thosioi* means the people or the country.¹¹ But more particularly because of the various possible readings/interpretations of *Reges Tocharorum Asiani interempti sacaraucae* (as indicated in the translation above). Gardiner-Garden argues that the entire reference (which it must be remembered is found in the anonymous *Prologus* to Book XI) might be read with equal validity as a list of separate topics dealt with by Trogus – that is, Scythian history, the kings of the Tocharoi, the Asiani and the Sacaraucae who are annihilated. 'The Asiani might thus have never conquered the Tocharoi, and correlations between a supposed conquest and any other recorded historical event are untenable'.

In light of the *Han Shu* reference to a possible Wusun incursion into Bactria considered in the previous chapter however, the proposed identification of the Asiani as Wusun should not be dismissed out of hand. De Guignes, Kingsmill and van Windekens all argued that *tsun* and *hu-sun* are phonetic renderings of the same indigenous tribal name, although this was disputed by Haloun.¹² More to the point is that, if one reads Trogus' *Prologus* XI.1 as inferring that the Asiani *became* kings of the Tochari, this could be a reference to the defeat of the Yuezhi by the Wusun in the III. However, no matter how confused the anonymous author of Trogus' Prologue might have been concerning events in Bactria between c. 140 and 130, it is difficult (although not perhaps impossible) to believe that he would have even have known about, let alone included, a Wusun victory over the Yuezhi in the far-off Ili Basin in an account of the conquest of the Bactrian Greeks south of the Amu Darya. Furthermore, whilst the Wusun clearly did defeat the Yuezhi, they never became their 'kings' or rulers. None the less, Gardiner-Garden is incorrect to state that 'there is no indication that the Wusun entered Bactria'.¹³ as HS 61.5A indicates: 'The *Kunmo* despoiled the population of Daxia, and then remained there in occupation'. As shown in Chapter Four, any Wusun incursion into Bactria (if it took place at all) was probably short-lived, but it remains at least a possibility that, following their defeat of the Yuezhi in 133 or 132, a Wusun force under the command of the *Kunmo* himself travelled (ahead of the Yuezhi?) through Ferghana and Sogdia, and proceeded to raid northern Bactria during the last two or three years of Sakan hegemony north of the Amu Darya. As such, the Asiori/Wusun (if they are the same) may indeed have played a role in the nomad overthrow of the Bactrian Greeks, although any such conclusion is of course highly speculative.

Tocharoi

The most substantial literature by far on the Trogus/Strabo list of nomadic conquerors of Bactria exists for the Tocharoi, who have been associated with a surprising range of peoples and names. In the nineteenth century, Yule and von Richthofen linked them with the *Tuharri* of Shenacherib's *Annals* (705-861 BCE), but the latter are

¹¹ Narain (1957) *op. cit.*, p. 129, n. 6.

¹² Gardiner-Garden *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹³ HS 61.5A.

¹⁴ See de Guignes *op. cit.*, Kingsmill *op. cit.*; and A.J. van Windekens, 'Huns blancs et Aéri: Essai sur les appellations du "tokharien"', *Museon* LIV (1941) pp. 176-180, and Haloun (1937) *op. cit.*, pp. 252-4.

¹⁵ Gardiner-Garden *op. cit.*, p. 38; and J. Gardiner-Garden, 'Chang Ch'ien and the Tochari: A Geography' (1986) pp. 31-37.

described in the *Annals* as being a town-dwelling people, not nomadic.¹¹⁶ The name used in the Chinese sources to refer to Bactria, *Ta Hsia* = Daxia, has also been identified with the Tocharians,¹¹⁷ but there is neither phonetic, geographical nor historical reason for doing so. They were also tentatively linked by von Richthofen and later Charpentier with an eastern people named in Pliny vi.xx.55 as the *Attacori* and certainly the phonetic link between the two is reasonably close.¹¹⁸ It is more likely, however, that the *Attacori* should be identified with the *Utara-kuru* (or 'Northern Tribes') named in the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. As was argued in Chapter One, the Tocharians are surely to be identified with the *Tukhara*/*Tushkara*/*Tushara* of the same source, and as the latter are clearly differentiated from the *Utara-kuru*, the two groups can hardly be one and the same. The more probable link between the Tocharians and the *Tukhara*/*Tushkara*/*Tushara* has been recognised for over a century by a number of western and eastern scholars, and is surely too strong to be denied.¹¹⁹ Clearly the most obvious and tenable link of all, as has been consistently argued throughout this study, is to identify the Tocharoi of Strabo and Ptolemy with the Tocharians of the Gansu and Tarim Basin, and hence with the Yuezhi of the Chinese sources.

Sacrauloi

As the tribal name clearly contains the ethnonym 'Saka', the identity of the *Sacrauloi* has never seriously been questioned (although Lohuizen did argue that the Tocharians were also Scythians/Sakas).¹²⁰ More problematic is the identity of the specific group of Sakas responsible for the invasion of Bactria. Ptolemy named a group called the *Auguloi*,¹²¹ which Herzfeld and Haloun both recognised as clearly a corruption of *Sakrauloi*.¹²² This emendation brought Ptolemy's list into line with Strabo's (incidentally implying that Apollodorus was also one of Ptolemy's original sources). However this link still allows for three possible locations for Ptolemy's *Sacrauloi*:¹²³ either close to the Aral Sea, along the Jaxartes/Syr Darya, or on the east coast of the Caspian Sea. The *Sacrauloi* have also been identified with the *Sai Wang* of the Chinese sources, but as Gardiner-Garden points out, 'few scholars have hesitated at regarding the Sai-wang as Saka, but many scholars have hesitated at identifying them as the "Sakrauloi"'.¹²⁴

As has been shown in previous chapters, the Chinese sources clearly name the *Sai* as a group of Sakas living in the Ili Valley/Ysyk Kul region, probably an eastern outpost of groups of the *Saka Haumavarga* (Amyrgians). Chapter Three offered a

¹¹⁶ H. Yule, 'Hwen T'sang's account of the principalities of Tokharistan, in which some previous geographical identifications are reconsidered', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1873) p. 85; F.F. von Richthofen, *China - Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien* (Graz 1877, 1971) pp. 430-441.

¹¹⁷ See Kingsmill (1906) *op. cit.* pp. 35-37; K. Shiratori, 'A study on Su-i'e, or Sogdiana', *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* II (1928) p. 144; Haneda (1933) *op. cit.* pp. 15-18.

¹¹⁸ Richthofen *op. cit.* pp. 490-1; Charpentier *op. cit.* p. 355.

¹¹⁹ Lassen (1867, reprint 1968) *op. cit.* pp. 1023-5; Yule (1873) *op. cit.* p. 95; F. Pargiter, *The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age* (Oxford 1913, reprint 1962) intro. and notes p. xix; Chattopadhyaya (1975) *op. cit.* pp. 68-70; Bagchi (1943) *op. cit.* pp. 28-29; 35-39.

¹²⁰ J.F. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, *The Scythian Period* (Leiden 1949) pp. 44-47.

¹²¹ *Prod.* xxxii.4.

¹²² Herzfeld (1932) *op. cit.* pp. 26-27; Haloun (1937) *op. cit.* p. 244, n. 2.

¹²³ Named in *Prod.* v. xix.14.

¹²⁴ Gardiner-Garden, *op. cit.* p. 54.

reconstruction of the probable course of the subsequent migration of that group of Sakas, through the western Tarim and across the Hanging Pass into Kashmir. The Yuezhi may also have come into contact with a second group of Amyrgian Sakas dwelling in the Ferghana Valley, who were probably also displaced in turn by the migrants and forced further south and/or west. The *Sacrauloi* of the Greek sources may thus have included western elements of the displaced Amyrgians, but as they were not evicted from Ferghana until late in the 130s, the Sakan-Scythian groups noted in Justin's epitome and other sources as being with the Parthians and Bactrians in the late 140s (if not as early as the mid-150s) must represent yet another group, perhaps an eastern extension of Herodotus' original *Saka Tavaiy paradraya* of the Black Sea region. Ptolemy's *Augaloi* of either the Caspian or Aral Sea coasts might thus perhaps be considered as descendant tribes of Herodotus' *Saka Tavaiy paradraya*, who were included in the 14th Satrapy of the Persian Empire in the late sixth century BCE.¹²⁵ These (or associated) groups had also been dwelling along the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) as Ptolemy suggests (the *Saka Tigraxaudai*),²⁶ and might therefore be identified as the militarised Sakas noted in Justin as causing problems for the Parthian kings between perhaps c. 155 and 88 BCE.

Conclusion. The Role of the Sakas and Yuezhi

To sum up, there is strong textual evidence of the activity of restive groups of Sakas in the general region of the Parthian and Bactrian states from the middle of the reign of Mithridates I (150s) until at least the late 120s BCE. These Sakas (the *Sacrauloi*) may have been tribes associated with the original *Saka Tavaiy paradraya* noted by Herodotus as constituting a satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. Over the ensuing four centuries these Sakas/Scythians occupied various regions along the coasts of the Black, Caspian and perhaps even Aral Seas. They probably also dwelt, by c. 145, along the Syr Darya and other valleys to the south (although still north of the Amu Darya), including that of the Surkhan Darya.

These people should not be confused with more easterly dwelling Saka groups that the Yuezhi displaced from the Ysyk Kul region in 162, and (perhaps) again from Ferghana in c. 132. The former Ysyk Kul tribes migrated south to Kashmir; the Amyrgians may also have turned south and sought refuge in the high eastern Pamir valleys, or in Sakan-occupied settlements of the western Tarim. By the late 130s, when the Yuezhi completed their migration and descended upon northern Bactria, they were confronted by a third powerful Saka force occupying not only northern Bactria (i.e. between the Zeravshan and Amu Darya), but also apparently parts of Bactria 'proper' (i.e. between the Amu Darya and Hindu Kush). For somewhere between c. 145 and 140 BCE the Bactrian kingdom founded just over a century earlier by Demetrius had suffered severe disruption at the hands of Saka invaders, at least a decade before the Yuezhi appeared in the region.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Herodotus iii 93.

¹²⁶ Ptolemy vii.ii.4.

¹²⁷ This was also the general argument of Narain (1957) *op. cit.* p. 141-2, although he originally dated the Yuezhi arrival to c. 139, and thus made their movements directly responsible for the Saka invasion of Bactria. Narain has maintained this view until as late as 2000, which is based on a chronology of the Yuezhi joining the Bi Valley as early as 138 and then pressing upon the Sakas and forcing them out (and a *contra* to the Scythians) of the north of Jaxartes, who were not allowed time to regroup. Yuezhi to establish a solid footing in the region, had no option but to

As will be shown below, the Chinese sources note Zhang Qian's description of Bactria soon after he reached the Yuezhi in c. 129 B as a land 'with no great ruler but only a number of petty chiefs ruling the various cities';²² also that 'Daxia had no major overlord or chief, and minor chiefs were frequently established in the towns.'²³ As has often been pointed out, this hardly sounds like the Greco-Bactrian kingdom of Euthydemus or Eucratides. The formerly powerful and successful state had clearly disintegrated into a fragmented entity of individual towns and fortified settlements controlled by local rulers. One obvious explanation for this is that by the time the Yuezhi arrived, the remaining Greek elites had already abandoned much of their former realm to the Saka hordes and refocused their attention south of the Hindu Kush (although remnants of Greek power persisted locally in parts of Bactria north of the Hindu Kush for up to another half century, demonstrably so if Cribb's theory about the length of Heliocles' reign is correct). Northern Greco-Bactria thus suffered (at least) two separate nomadic 'conquests' – by the Sakas in c. 145-140 and by the Yuezhi a decade and a half later.

When the Yuezhi arrived in northern Bactria, they must have defeated the Saka residents (as evidence of wall painting fragments from Khalehayan and Dalverzin-Tepe considered below seems to depict) and taken over the previously Saka-occupied urban centers and fortresses north of the Amu Darya. For whatever reason, it clearly did not yet suit the Yuezhi to continue further south and occupy Bactria proper. Perhaps the conditions in the fertile Surkhan Darya – with prepared and productive agricultural croplands, irrigation and defensible urban centres – made it preferable to the more arid south. It hardly mattered, at any rate. So complete was the Yuezhi's defeat of the Sakas that their victory over them in northern Bactria also gave the Yuezhi *de facto* control of Sakan-controlled areas of Bactria south of the Oxus as well, which accounts for Zhang Qian's observation that although the Yuezhi dwelt north of the Gui-Oxus/Amu Darya, they had also 'conquered' and 'subjugated' Daxia.²⁴ This is surely the most likely explanation of the 'nomad conquest(s) of Bactria', and accounts for the political situation observed by Zhang Qian when he finally caught up with his quarry in their new northern Bactrian stronghold.

II

The Mission of Zhang Qian – Stage Four

128 BCE: Zhang Qian Reaches the Yuezhi in Northern Bactria

As was shown in the previous chapter, the textual evidence clearly indicates that Zhang Qian, with the help of guides and interpreters provided by the king of Dayuan, travelled from Ferghana into Sogdiana and thence into northern Bactria. There he was finally able to interview the ruler of the Yuezhi, now firmly in control of the dynasty's new realm.²⁵ The *Han Shu* describes the state of mind of the Yuezhi leadership:

forward – Naram (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 32. This is also the general contention of Enoki (1959) *op. cit.*, p. 228, and Gindler-Garden, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²² SH 123, Watson p. 235.

²³ HS 96A 15A.

²⁴ SH 123, Watson p. 234, HS 96A 15A.

²⁵ HS 61 – SH 123, Watson p. 232.

'The king of the Da Yuezhi had been killed by the nomads, and his son had been established as king (or co-king), having subjugated Daxia (sic) (remained loyal to Han) and made friends with few brigands, and the Da Yuezhi had set their mind on a life of peace and contentment. In addition, being themselves removed (far) they wished to keep their distance from Han and had no intention at all of taking revenge on the nomads.'¹²

The *Shi Ji's* version is almost identical:

'Since the king of the Great Yuezhi had been killed by the Xiongnu, his son had succeeded him as ruler and had forced the kingdom of Daxia to recognize his sovereignty. The region he ruled was rich and fertile and seldom troubled by invaders, and the king thought only of his own enjoyment. He considered the Han too far away to bother with and had no particular intention of avenging his father's death by attacking the Xiongnu.'¹³

The accounts provide information on the probable location of the newly-resettled Yuezhi, the most likely of which (as will be argued below) was along the river valleys of northern Bactria, specifically that of the Surkhan Darya. Firstly, the region in which the Yuezhi had settled was contiguous to Kangju Sogdia, as northern Bactria clearly was. Secondly, the area was rich and fertile, suggesting the probability of a river valley (or valleys). Thirdly, the land had few brigands (or was seldom troubled by invaders), indicating either that the region was remote and inaccessible (unlikely); that it held few attractions for invaders (even less likely given its stated fertility and wealth); or that it had been under the control of a strong central power for some time, as northern Bactria had been under the Greco-Bactrians (perhaps the Kangju also¹⁴) and, more recently, under the Sakas. A further inference is that if any brigands or invaders had been in residence there, they had been rapidly evicted by the Yuezhi.

The fourth significant piece of information contained in the above references is that the Yuezhi had already established some sort of hegemony over the state of Daxia (Bactria) proper, which in 129/8 was still separate and distinguishable from the new lands of the Yuezhi. Indeed, Zhang Qian (as will be shown below) clearly differentiated between the new 'state' of the Da Yuezhi, and the 'state' of Daxia itself, even if the latter was now also under Yuezhi hegemony. As concluded above, this shows that the former occupiers of northern Bactria (the Sakas) must have also been in control of substantial parts of Bactria south of the Amu Darya, and that the Yuezhi's victory over them in 130 had as a consequence also given them some sort of hegemony over the former Sakan/Bactrian realm. In that sense, although apparently not yet motivated to occupy Bactria south of the Amu Darya, they had none the less 'subjugated' the broader state and forced the 'native' Bactrians (presumably both Greek and Iranian-speaking) to recognise their sovereignty over them. These events must have occurred in the year or so between the arrival of the Yuezhi in (probably) 130 and the arrival of Zhang Qian in 129 or 128.

To Zhang Qian's undoubted disappointment, the ruler of the Yuezhi confederation had no intention of entering into any sort of alliance with the Han, let alone returning to confront their former enemies, the Xiongnu. This is hardly surprising considering

the three devastating defeats the Xiongnu had managed to inflict upon the Yuezhi in the course not to mention the trials of a thirty-year migration. Having finally arrived in a rich and fertile region, and having not only defeated and evicted the resident Sakas but also established hegemony over the entire Bactrian state, it is no wonder that the Yuezhi ruler had set his/her mind on a 'life of ease' and given up all thoughts of exacting revenge on the Xiongnu for the death of his/her father in 167. After this initial contact, Zhang Qian remained in the region for another twelve months or so, and visited the Bactrian capital before returning to the Yuezhi 'court' for one final attempt to convince the Yuezhi ruler to join with the Han. Before turning to those events, however, some attempt must be made to locate more precisely the political centre of the newly-acquired Yuezhi realm.

III

The Location of the Yuezhi's Principal Settlement North of the Amu Darya

Information on the arrival and settlement of the Yuezhi confederation somewhere north of the Amu Darya is provided by both Sima Qian and Ban Gu, not only in their reporting of the account Zhang Qian gave to Wudi upon his return to Xian in 126, but also in a later report (following the provision of additional information by the Office of the Protector General) contained in the 'Account of the Western Regions' in the *Han Shu*. The description of the 'state' of the Da Yuezhi in this later *Han Shu* report refers to the situation during the period between their arrival north of the Amu Darya and their expansion southwards into Bactria proper, i.e. between 130 and perhaps 80 BCE. Together these references contain most of the Chinese textual evidence for the key issues of this half-century of Yuezhi history – the location of the Yuezhi and of their principal city; the lifeway of the Yuezhi during this period; the visit of Zhang Qian; and the establishment of Yuezhi hegemony over Bactria.

Textual Evidence for the Location of the 'State' of the Da Yuezhi

'The Great Yuezhi live some 2000 or 3000 *li* west of Dayuan, north of the Gui River. They are bordered on the south by Daxia, on the west by Anxi, and on the north by Kangju'.¹³⁴

'The seat of (the king's) government is at the town of Jianshi, and it is distant by 11,600 *li* from Changan'. . . To the east it is a distance of 4,740 *li* to the seat of the Protector General, and to the west one reaches Anxi after 49 days journey; to the south it adjoins Chipin (Jibin).¹³⁵

These locational descriptions refer specifically to the major concentration of the Da Yuezhi federation centred upon the 'seat of (the king's) government' at Jianshi, somewhere to the north of the Amu Darya. Jianshi is thus located some 4,600 kilometres west of Xian; to the south of Sogdiana; to the north of the Amu Darya and Bactria; between 800 and 1200 kilometres west (more accurately southwest) of the Ferghana Valley; and 49 days journey east of the Parthian border. As noted in Chapter Three, Michael Loewe has estimated an average rate of 18 kilometres per day for mail

¹³⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹³⁵ HS 96A 14B.

delivery in the Western Regions under Han administration, which would indicate a very approximate distance of about 880 kilometres to the Amu Parthian border.

This cumulative and detailed information suggests that the principal settlement of the Yuezhi (c. 130 to c. 80 BCE) should most probably be located in the contemporary Uzbek province of Surkhondare, centred upon the Surkhan Darya, Serobod Darya and associated valleys, probably somewhere in a V-shaped area between present-day Botsun and Denov in the north, and Termez on the Amu Darya in the south, a location supported by the archaeological evidence considered below. It is also possible that elements of the Yuezhi confederation might have settled along the Vakhsh and Kafirnigan river valleys to the south of Dushanbe and east of Surkhondare Province. Essential for the establishment of a more precise location is the identification of Jianshi itself, a problem that has long occupied philologists, archaeologists and historians alike.¹⁰⁰

Theories on the Location of Jianshi

One of the earliest attempts to locate Jianshi was made in 1907 by Chavannes who suggested Badakhshan, a mountainous and relatively infertile region well to the east of the Surkhan Darya, and south of the extensive northern bend in the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border.¹⁰¹ Farn, in both 1938 and again in 1951, suggested Alexandria-on-the-Oxus, also well to the east of Surkhondare.¹⁰² In 1963 Pulleyblank proposed the more centrally located Khulm (present-day Kholm in Afghanistan) as a possibility, arguing that:

‘The first syllable of this transcription (*qian* or *chin*) must represent the name later known as Khulm. Khulm is a large ancient site in the heart of Tokharestan east of Balkh, strategically situated on the cross roads between the east-west road and the north-south route between Transoxiana and the Hindukush’.¹⁰³

But the identification of Jianshi with Khulm (south east of Termez and east of Mazar-e Sharif) directly contradicts the statement in the *Shi Ji* that the ‘capital’ was *north* of the Gih/Oxus River. This is a key and obvious point also noted by Abdullaev, whose general locational argument this book is in agreement with:

‘All the hypothetical locations of the town ... do not take into account the fact that, according to the chronicle, the town was situated to the north of the river Gih (Oxus-Amu Darya). North of the river Amu Darya can only mean a particular area of its course, roughly between 66 degrees E and 69 degrees E longitude; therefore this area must lie around 42 degrees N latitude, for after this point the river turns in a northwesterly direction. Thus the place indicated by the chronicle is situated in the southern part of the modern republics of Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan, a region which constituted the northern part of Bactria’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Loewe (1967) vol. I *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ ‘Jianshi’ should not be confused with the later Yuezhi capital *south* of the Amu Darya, ‘Lanshi’, which is generally (and correctly) associated with Bactra. See Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 44, and Hulsewe and Loewe (1979) *op. cit.*, p. 119 n. 278 for discussions on this important distinction.

¹⁰² Chavannes (1907) *op. cit.*, p. 187 n. 2.

¹⁰³ Farn *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ Pulleyblank (1962) *op. cit.*, p. 122; see also Pulleyblank (1966) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ K. Abdullaev, ‘Nomadism in Central Asia: The Archaeological Evidence (2nd-1st Centuries BCE)’, in A. Invernizzi, ed., *In the Land of the Gryphons: Papers on Central Asian Archaeology* (Florence 1995) pp. 153-4.

Yet even within the limits of Abdullaev's location there remain many possible candidates. Abdullaev himself argues for Dalverzin Tepe,⁴² while Narain suggests Termez, located on the northern bank of the Amu Darya:

The earlier capital of the Da Yuezhi, which was north of the Oxus, has now apparently well be around Termez, so far the largest archaeological complex of site, where much work has been done.⁴³

Jorday has argued that the centre of Yuezhi power during the visit of Zhang Qian was considerably further north, actually in the delta of the Syr Darya close to the Aral Sea, 'in the 'Scythian delta', formerly the site of (Kangju) winter camps, in the vicinity of Babish Mulla, Balandy and Chirki'.⁴⁴ This location might satisfy the basic criterion of being north of the Amu Darya, but there is little evidence to support such a relocation so far to the northwest. Clearly the wide range of these theories indicates that the textual references are unable to provide anything more than a generalised location for Jianshi, and it is therefore necessary to turn to archaeological evidence in the hope of determining a more exact location. Narain is correct in noting that it is in the environs of Termez that most archaeological work in the region has been done, but the history of excavation throughout northern Bactria is extensive and varied.

*History of Archaeological Research in Northern Bactria*⁴⁵

Large-scale archaeological research began at Termez as early as 1926 with the discovery of the Zurmala stupa⁴⁶ and the Kara Tepe caves,⁴⁷ both dated to the general 'Kushan era'. In the early thirties Mason began to excavate the ancient town-site of Airtam (east of Termez) which resulted in the discovery of a superb stone relief depicting musicians, along with examples of Kushan pottery, coins of Kanishka and detailed stone architecture of the 'Great Kushan' period.⁴⁸ Following the end of the Second World War, detailed archaeological investigation along the Vakhsh and Kafirnigan river valleys was also initiated, including the excavation of sites at Hissar.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴³ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Jorday (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁴⁵ Soviet and Russian archaeologists refer to the Sarchondare region as 'Northern Bactria' a convention I have followed throughout this book. It should be noted, however, that Narain in particular finds the use of this term unjustifiable, arguing that the region was never a part of the sovereign state of Bactria, but of Sogdiana. In Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 55 n. 2. On the other hand, Stavisky, for example, regards the area to the immediate north of the Amu Darya as simply an extension of the Bactrian state south of the river, and views the Amu Darya as merely a temporary border between the Yuezhi and Bactria pre-Yuezhi occupation: 'non pas une frontière constante délimitant une région historico-culturelle mais une frontière temporaire entre les La Yue tche ... et les pays de la rive gauche.' in B. J. Staviskij, *La Bactriane sous les Kushans. Problèmes d'histoire et de culture* (Paris 1986) p. 52.

⁴⁶ See A. S. Strelkov, 'Zurmala ili Katta-Tyupé okolo Termeza (Zurmala or Katta-Tyupé near Termez)' *Kultura i iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (History of Uzbek Art) (Moscow 1927) pp. 27-30; and G. A. Pugachenkova and I. I. Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana* (History of Uzbek Art) (Moscow 1965) pp. 53-4.

⁴⁷ See A. S. Strelkov, 'Dobislamskie pamyatniki Termeza (Pre-Islamic Monuments in Termez)', *Kultura i iskusstvo* II (Moscow 1928) p. 46; also I. V. Grek, I. G. Pchelina and B. J. Staviskij, *Kara-tepe budhistika pishchichnyy monastyer' v Statom Termez (Kara-tepe: A Buddhist Cave Monastery in Old Termez)* (Moscow 1964), pp. 5, 83.

⁴⁸ See M. I. Masson, 'Skul'ptura Airtama' (The Sculpture of Airtam), *Izvestiya* No. 2 (1935) pp. 129-134 for example.

Kalati-Mu, Key-Kobad-shah and Munchak-Tepe. Discoveries included burial mounds, the remains of monumental structures with stone column bases, coins, artifacts, and traces of ancient irrigation systems, all of the Kushan period.¹²⁷

Archaeological investigation of the Surkhan Darya valley itself commenced in 1942 when a team led by Albain uncovered towns, fortresses and castles of the Kushan era, along with pottery, terracotta figurines of animals and humans, and a substantial number of Kushan coins (as well as a Roman coin of Nero).¹²⁸ However, it was a team from the Uzbek Academy of Sciences led by Pugachenkova which between 1959 and 1963 made one of the most significant archaeological discoveries of northern Bactria when they excavated at Khatchayan a small crude structure containing fragments of murals and magnificent clay sculptures.¹²⁹ Khatchayan remains one of the principal candidates for identification as Jianshi, and as such will be considered in greater detail below.

In 1967 the same team also discovered a Kushan Buddhist temple near Dalverzin Tepe, while another group led by Stavisky of the USSR Academy of Sciences made important Kushan discoveries in the early to mid-60s at Kara-Tepe in Old Termez.¹³⁰ It is only through an analysis of the evidence provided by the excavation of some of the more likely urban sites uncovered by Soviet and Russian archaeologists that any attempt to positively identify the Yuezhi's 'capital' of Jianshi might be made. A consideration of archaeological discoveries of non-urban, nomadic burial-grounds also unearthed in northern Bactria will be included later in the chapter, as it provides additional evidence not only of the presence of the Yuezhi (and other militarised nomad groups) in the region during the latter third of the second century BCE, but also of the lifeway of the Yuezhi during the half-century before their occupation of Bactria proper.

Excavation of Urban Sites – the Location of Jianshi

Archaeological investigation of a significant number of urban sites in northern Bactria has intensified during the past three decades, but although considerably more detailed knowledge has been obtained, the question of the identity of Jianshi remains unresolved. In the 1970s alone, excavations in the valleys of the Surkhan, Vakhsh and Balkhab rivers revealed the existence of perhaps 25 different urban centres, including

¹²⁷ See for example M.M. Dyakonov, 'Arkheologicheskie raboty v nizhnem techenii reki Kafirnigana (Kobadian) 1950-51 gg.' (Archaeological Investigations in the Lower reaches of the Kafirnigan [Kobadian] 1950-51), *MLA SSSR* No. 37 (Moscow-Leningrad 1953) pp. 279-292, A.M. Mandleshtam and S.B. Pevzner, 'Raboty Kafirniganskogo otryada v 1952-53 gg.' (The Work of the Kafirnigan Group in 1952-53) *MLA SSSR* No. 66 (Moscow-Leningrad 1954) pp. 290-342, B.A. Litvinsky and F.A. Davidovich, 'Predvaritel'nyi otechet o rabotakh Khuttalskogo otryada na territorii Vakhshskoi doliny v 1953 godu' (Preliminary report on the Work of the Khuttal Group on the Territory of the Vakhsh Valley in 1953) *Doklady AN Tadzh. SSR*, fasc. II (1954) pp. 53-60, B.A. Litvinsky and I.I. Zeymal, 'Vazy iz Vakhshskoi doliny' (Vases from the Vakhsh Valley) *Izvestiya AN Tadzh. SSR* No. 1, 22 (1960) pp. 73-79. For a more extensive list of publications by Soviet archaeologists on a range of sites in the Vakhsh and Kafirnigan valleys, see G.M. Bongard-Levin, and B.Y. Stavisky, 'Central Asia in the Kushan Period', in *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (1970) *op. cit.* pp. 36-8, ns. 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30.

¹²⁸ See for example I.I. Albain, *Balak-Tepe* (Tashkent 1960), and I.I. Albain, 'Gorodische Dalverzin-tepe' (The Town Site of Dalverzin-Tepe), *IAKUZ*, fasc. 7 (Tashkent 1966) pp. 47-65.

¹²⁹ See originally G.A. Pugachenkova, *Khatchayan* (Tashkent 1966).

¹³⁰ See I.G. Pchelina and B.Y. Stavisky, 'Kara-tepe: Remains of a Buddhist Monastery of the Kushan period in Old Termez', in *Indo-Asian Studies* Pt. I (1963) for example.

some very large towns of up to several hundred hectares in area such as Balkh, Termez, Fannat and Shakhristan.¹³³ By the mid-nineties Stavisky observed that

Archaeological fieldwork in this area (northern Bactria in general) has revealed in certain cases settlements of the Achaemenid era and 200 dating to the Kushan period. The net result, however, is the overall increase in the number of settlements under the Kushans is complemented by an increase in the area of irrigated land.¹³⁴

Many of these post-Achaemenid urban centres date from the first century (C.F. note to the post-Yuezhi 'Kushan Era') and must have been built by the early Kushans. With their thick walls, solid rectangular towers and standardised rectangular layout, they were mostly constructed according to a single elaborate plan.¹³⁵ However the early Kushans also adopted (and adapted) Hellenistic urban centres, and it is probably somewhere amongst these pre-existing, strategically located Greco-Bactrian- and Saka-occupied settlements that the original Yuezhi 'capital' of Jianshi is to be found. It should be remembered that Zhang Qian was able to observe by as early as 128/29 (two years at most since the Yuezhi's arrival) that the Yuezhi were already comfortably installed in Jianshi. This indicates that the invaders must have rapidly selected a pre-existing fortified structure, no doubt located in a strategically advantageous position to both dominate the region and control the principal communication routes. Yet even within this narrowing set of criteria, several possible candidates for Jianshi remain. Chief amongst them are Kampyr Tepe, Payonkurgan and Khalechayan.

Kampyr Tepe

Kampyr Tepe (which means 'Hill of the Old Lady' in Uzbek) is located on the northern bank of the Amu Darya in Surkhondare Province, 30 kilometres west of Termez near the village of Shurob. It was discovered by Riveladze of the Uzbek Institute of Fine Arts, and was dug annually from 1979 to 1992, and then again since 1999.¹³⁶ Extensively fortified with a citadel in the centre surrounded by domestic buildings, Kampyr Tepe commanded an important Oxus crossing point. The fortified area is four hectares in area, with outside walls five metres thick reinforced by an interior gallery, rectangular towers and a moat. In the centre is a citadel (150 m. N x 100 m.) with mud-brick walls up to five metres thick surrounded by a moat up to ten metres wide. Three periods of occupation have been identified:

- a) The foundation of the fortress (precursor to the later citadel) can be dated to the third to first centuries BCE, i.e. to the Greco-Bactrian period, although most of this settlement has apparently been eroded away by the Amu Darya.

¹³³ See B. Stavisky, 'The Archaeology of Central Asian and the 'Kushan Question' in the Light of Research Carried Out Between 1966 and 1993', in CIAA Newsletter No. 5 (May 1997) p.3, for a brief introduction to more recent Soviet and Russian excavation in the region.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Bongard-Levin and Stavisky, 'Central Asia in the Kushan Period', in *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (p. ed.), p. 44.

¹³⁶ See for example E. V. Riveladze, 'K lokalizatsii grecheskoj perepravy no Okse', *Vestnik Drevnej istorii* No. 4 (1977); E. V. Riveladze, 'Kampyr-tepe: razrukhennye dokumenty i monety', *Bulleten' of the Asia Institute* No. 8 (Boston 1994/5) pp. 12.

b) Then, between the second and first centuries BCE, only the citadel area of the site was occupied.

c) From the first century BCE to the second century CE, the major fortress was constructed during the obvious apogee of the site. This clearly represents the extension and consolidation of Kushan power in the region.

Rivelandze identifies Kampyr Tepe as a significant 'Greek crossing-point on the Oxus',¹⁵⁷ suggesting that it was initially founded by the Greco-Bactrian kings to guard an important crossing of the Amu Darya on the road leading to the Bactria capital of Bactra (Balkh) which is only 60 kilometres to the south.¹⁵⁸ As has been argued in this chapter, it is possible that sometime towards the end of the 140s the Greeks had been forced to abandon this and many other sites by the Sakas. Rivelandze's 'middle period' (second to first centuries BCE) probably represents the occupation of this pre-existing Greco-Bactrian citadel by the Sakas (initially), followed by the Yuezhi soon after their arrival in the Surkhan Darya valley. Whilst it is impossible to prove that this was Jianshi, such a well-fortified and strategically-located site would have been an ideal base from which both to control the general Surkhan Darya region as well as to subdue Bactria south of the Amu Darya.

Payonkurgan

The fortress of Payonkurgan was erected on a natural hill located near the district centre of Bojsun in southern Uzbekistan, relatively close to the major Samarkand–Termez road and some 120 kilometres north of the Amu Darya. Twelve kilometres to the west are the so-called 'Iron-Gates' (present-day 'Temur Gates'), an important pass through the Kugitang Mountains traversed by the road from Samarkand. As Abdullaev describes this strategic location: 'Thus the site lies on the crossroads of ancient caravan communications connecting Sogd with northern Bactria, specifically with the region of the ... upper and middle areas of the Surkhan Darya Valley'.¹⁵⁹

There are three floors or levels to the site, constructed in its southern part directly on the fortification walls. This suggests that during the last habitation period, the fortress lost its military function. Each of the three floors has yielded rich archaeological material including early Kushan pottery. The numismatic discoveries indicate that the fortress was occupied by the Kushans during the reigns of Vima Tak(ta) (c. 78–116 CE), Vima Kadphises (c. 116–127), Kanishka (c. 127–153) and Huvishka (c. 154–192).¹⁶⁰ The terminal layer of the site contains a coin of Huvishka, indicating that

¹⁵⁷ See V. F. Minorsky, 'A Greek Crossing on the Oxus', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* vol. 30, 1 (1967) pp. 45–53.

¹⁵⁸ E. V. Rivelandze, 'Archaeological research at Kampyr Tepe: A Kushan Fortress on the Oxus', in *CTAA Newsletter* No. 10 (November 1999) pp. 5–7.

¹⁵⁹ K. Abdullaev, 'Payonkurgan: New Archaeological Discoveries in Northern Bactria', *CTAA Newsletter* No. 10 (November 1999) pp. 7–9.

¹⁶⁰ These dates are based on a 2000 study by Harry Falk which argues that the first year of Kanishka's reign was 127 CE. Falk bases his argument on the reinterpretation of a portion of a third century CE Buddhist literary reference in the *Yavanajataka* of *Sphujidhva*. Falk's reading suggests that this text provides a formula for relating the Kanishka Era to the already dated Shaka Era (which began in 78 CE). The *Yavanajataka* clearly differentiates between the two eras, and provides a formula for relating the beginning of each based on Vedic *rita* (astrological) cycles. See H. Falk, 'The Kanishka Era', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, 1 (2000) pp. 1–12.

from the late-second century Payonkurgan lost its military function and became an agricultural settlement.

Although most layers excavated have yielded artifacts dating back only as far as the first century CE, the most recent work with which I am familiar (1998) has unearthed ceramics of the Greco-Bactrian and earlier periods (from perhaps as early as the late fourth to early third centuries BCE). If future investigations provide more concrete evidence of Hellenistic layers, then the discovery of arrowheads of the 'nomadic type' (with three wings of short or long shafts pointing down) might indicate that the defenders had been overwhelmed by nomadic invaders. Payonkurgan was thus probably also a pre-existing strategic and well-established fortress, which was occupied by the Sakas and then by the Yuezhi soon after their arrival in the region, to function as a fortified base for activity both north and south of the Amu Darya.

Strengthening a probable Yuezhi association with the site is the recent discovery made nearby of nomadic tomb complexes - Rabat I, II and III.¹⁶¹ In Rabat I ten tombs have been uncovered, and the archaeological material (including arrow-heads, a mirror and jewellery) is similar to artefacts discovered in possible Yuezhi tombs near Tulkhar and Aruktau, as will be considered below. The necropolis at Rabat II dates to the later Kushan period, while Rabat III is yet to be excavated. The probability of Yuezhi occupation of Payonkurgan (and thus the possibility that the site might be identified as Jianshi) is clearly very strong although there is as yet no way of proving it.

Khalchayan

The site of Khalchayan remains the most likely candidate for identification with Jianshi.¹⁶² Located on the upper Surkhan Darya in the vicinity of Denov (some 120 kilometres north of the Amu Darya), Pugachenkova commenced excavation of the site in 1959. Stratigraphically, the lowest layers date the complex from as early as the late-fourth or early-third centuries BCE, and the Yuezhi-early Kushan layers follow closely upon those of the Greco-Bactrian, suggesting that the Yuezhi simply took over Khalchayan immediately following their arrival in the region. However their occupation of the complex would not have been easy - they were probably forced to defeat and evict a group of heavily-armed Sakas who were already in occupation, as will be shown below. The town then flourished through the 'Early' and 'Great' Kushan eras until its decline during the third century CE, no doubt as a result of the disintegration of the Kushan Empire following the Sasanian conquests. The discovery of bronze imitations of Greco-Bactrian tetradrachms of Helioctes, potentially amongst the first tentative coinage issues of the Yuezhi (although the issuing of coins dates to the later five-yabghu period) is further evidence that Khalchayan should be regarded

Sphuriddhivara and the era of the Kusanas', in *Silk Roads: Art and Archaeology* VII (2001) pp. 121-136. See also D. Jongeward, *Buddhist Art of Pakistan and Afghanistan*, South Asian Studies Papers no. 14 (University of Toronto, Center for South Asian Studies, 2003) pp. 11, 26 and 32.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

¹⁶² Three accessible general introductions to Khalchayan are to be found in G. Frankin (1970 *op. cit.*, pp. 113 ff.), J. Harmatta et al., 'Religions in the Kushan Empire', in Harmatta, J. (ed.), *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol II* (UNESCO, Paris, 1994) pp. 316 ff. and G. A. Pugachenkova et al., 'Kushan Art', in Harmatta (ed. *op. cit.*), Chap. 15. For more detailed information see the references in pp. 148, 159, 160-161 and 167.

as one of the most important, and certainly one of the earliest, Yuezhi urban complexes in northern Bactria.

Harmatta argues that at the very least Khalechayan must be identified as 'the first centre of the Kushan yabghu', i.e. as the 'capital' of the Kueizhuang yabghu.¹⁶⁵ Stavisky has also nominated Khalechayan as probably the earliest Yuezhi site in northern Bactria, suggesting that the nearby site of Dalverzin Tepe (also excavated by Pugachenkova and, as noted above, proposed by Abdullaev as a potential candidate for Jianshi)¹⁶⁶ in fact 'represents a continuation of the Khalechayan tradition', i.e. post-dates the development of Khalechayan.¹⁶⁷ Dalverzin Tepe is also an important early Kushan site, but although some pre-Kushan material has been discovered there, the majority of the discoveries made have been of the early-Kushan rather than the Yuezhi era.¹⁶⁸

The Khalechayan finds consist mainly of coins, figurines, ossuaries, pottery, wall paintings and, above all, sculptures. All of the early art works were recovered from a small building (or palace?) which Pugachenkova argued was a 'house of deified ancestors' connected with the dynastic cults of the early Kushans. The clay figurines date from as early as the fifth century BCE while the wall paintings are extant in fragments only. Some of these fragments are purely decorative – flowers, fruit, vines – while others come from large human and animal figures. The abundance of clay sculpture fragments allowed Pugachenkova to attempt a reconstruction of the interior of the 'palace'. The most significant representation, she suggested, is a group representing a triumphal procession of the victorious Yuezhi. She links the ethnic identity of the family with the royal portrait on the so-called Heraus coins, particularly the depiction of a male head with hair combed back and held in place by a ribbon across the brow, calling them the 'family of Heraus'.¹⁶⁹ For over a century (since soon after Cunningham and Gardiner published the first known Heraus coins in the nineteenth century)¹⁷⁰ Heraus has consistently been identified as one of the important early princes of the Kueizhuang yabghu. In 1993, however, Cribb showed convincingly that the coins previously attributed to Heraus were in fact issues of the early Kushan king Kujula Kadphises, and dated from c. 50-80 CE.¹⁷¹ Yet even if

¹⁶⁵ J. Harmatta et al., 'Religions in the Kushan Empire' (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 316.

¹⁶⁶ Abdullaev (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁶⁷ Stavisky (May 1997) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ On Dalverzin Tepe see G.A. Pugachenkova and E.V. Riveladze et al., *Dalverzintepa. Kusanski gorod na rube Uzbekistana* (Tashkent 1978); and G.A. Pugachenkova, *Les trésors de Dalverzintepa* (Leningrad 1978).

¹⁶⁹ See G.A. Pugachenkova, *Halcajan. A probleme indoevropennoj kul'tury Severnoj Baktrii* (Tashkent 1966) for her general argument, and G.A. Pugachenkova, *Skulptura Halcajana* (Moscow 1971), figs. 63-64 for the portrait in question.

¹⁷⁰ Both Cunningham and Gardiner initially considered the Heraus coins to be Sakan issues. See for example A. Cunningham, 'Coins of the Indo-Scythian king Miao, or Heraus', *Numismatic Chronicle* (1888) pp. 47-58, and P. Gardiner, 'A Coin of Heraus, Saka king', *Numismatic Chronicle* (1874) pp. 161-16.

¹⁷¹ Joe Cribb, 'The "Heraus" coins: their attribution to the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises, c. AD 30-80', in M. Price, A. Burnett and R. Hland eds., *Essays in Honour of Robert Carson and Kenneth Jenkins* (London 1993) pp. 107-134. Cribb's re-attribution is by no means universally accepted, however. For a contra view see M. Alam, 'Indo-Parthian and Early Kushan Coins: The Numismatic Evidence', in M. Alam and D. Klimburg-Salter, eds., *Coins, Art & Archaeology* (Vienna 1999) pp. 19 ff.

could have been no such yabghu ruler as Heraios. Pugachenkova's argument would still hold if the group represents a triumphal procession of Yuezhi warriors.

The problem with this interpretation is that there are two distinctly different groups of warriors represented – both lightly-armed archers and heavily-armed, armour-clad cavalry. The heavy cavalry differ from the light mounted archers both in their armour, and also in their physical or ethnic type – the former seem European, the latter more Mongoloid. In 1987 Bernard proposed a new interpretation of the composition, suggesting that the scene represented a battle between the lightly-armed Yuezhi invaders and the Saka defenders of both the complex and the region.²⁷⁰ The argument (supported by Abdullaev and Nehru, amongst others), is that the scene dramatically depicts the lightly-armed, recently arrived (Mongoloid?) Yuezhi defeating the armour-clad (Europoid?) Saka defenders of Khalechayan and northern Bactria.

Even if this interpretation is correct, the fact that the Yuezhi warriors appear more 'Mongoloid' in appearance sheds no real light on the ethnicity of the Yuezhi dynasty itself. If the lighter armed archers do in fact represent an attack by forces of the Yuezhi confederation on the resident Sakas, the particular mounted archers involved would probably be from only one particular faction or detachment within that broad coalition. As has been consistently argued, the massive migrating horde that left the Hsi in 133 or 132 was made up of a wide variety of different tribes, ethnicities and linguistic groups who all chose, for one reason or another, to offer their allegiance to the Yuezhi ruling dynasty. In this context, pastoral-nomadic military forces were no different to those of most of the great Outer Eurasian sedentary armies of the ancient world, including the Romans, Persians, Macedonians, Parthians and even the Later Han, all of whom included a heterogeneous array of military units of varying ethnicities and lifeways amongst their fighting forces. None the less, if the reinterpretation of this evidence is accepted, the fact that the Yuezhi hierarchy apparently chose to depict warriors of one particular (Mongoloid?) ethnicity on the walls of Khalechayan is intriguing.

The Bernard/Abdullaev interpretation of the paintings is of course highly speculative and based on fragmentary evidence, but it is supported by the archaeological, numismatic and classical source evidence extensively explored above. Their conclusion also strengthens the claim for identifying Khalechayan as Jianshi. If the Sakas were already in occupation of the complex (i.e. had previously expelled the Greeks from the region and taken over their strongholds) then the decision by the victorious Yuezhi dynasty to represent artistically their victory over the Sakas at Khalechayan suggests that it was here, close to this very stronghold, that the first victory of the Yuezhi in northern Bactria may have been effected.

Similar interpretations of artistic representations found at other urban complexes in northern Bactria have also been made. At Dalverzin Tepe, for example, in a complex known to archaeologists as the 'residence of a rich towns-person',²⁷¹ other wall

²⁷⁰ P. Bernard, 'Les nomades conquérants de l'empire gréco-bactrien', in *CRAI* (1987) pp. 756–768.

²⁷¹ See Abdullaev *op. cit.* p. 136; also L. Nehru, 'Khudchayan Revisited', in *Silk Roads Art and Archaeology* 6 (1999/2000) p. 218.

²⁷² On this building see L. Belyaev, 'Zitot dom bogatogo gorozanina', in V. A. Pugachenkova, I. Ruzhicheva et al. eds., (1978) *op. cit.* pp. 33–47.

painting fragments have been discovered, including a polychrome painting of a warrior with helmet, and the muzzle of a red-armour-clad horse. These fragments are clearly from an artistic style similar to depictions found on Saka coins of the 1st to the sculptures of Khalechayan and to a gypsum figurine found at Ai Khanoum. Abdullaev argues that here again the style is Saka and the fragments are all that remain of wall paintings executed at Dalverzin Tepe by the pre-Yuezhi invasion Saka occupants of the complex.

'Evidently in the period before the invasion of the Yueh-chih, the ancient city was inhabited by a people of nomad origin, and specifically by the Sakas, and it is precisely this population that is represented by the warrior in the fragment.'

In conclusion, these interpretations of sculpture and painted fragments found at Khalechayan and Dalverzin Tepe offer further evidential support to the general argument outlined above – that the Yuezhi, upon their arrival in the Surkhan Darya valley in 130 BCE, were forced to engage and evict a group of heavily-armed Saka residents. Their victory forced the Sakas further south (events largely outside the limits of this study) and the Yuezhi dynasty settled into the previously Sakan-occupied urban complexes, in particular that of Khalechayan. As such, while it still remains virtually impossible to prove, Khalechayan must surely be regarded as the principal candidate for identification as Jianshi.

IV

The Size, Strength and Lifeway of the Yuezhi North of the Amu Darya

Textual Evidence

As noted in previous chapters, the Chinese sources appear to offer ambiguous descriptions of the way of life of the Yuezhi when Zhang Qian found them in the Surkhan Darya. Although they had taken more than thirty years to complete their journey, suggesting a nomadic lifeway, most of those years had been spent in semi-sedentary existence in the fertile Ili Valley. The *Shi Ji* version of Zhang Qian's account describes the Yuezhi as *still* 'a nation of nomads'¹⁷⁵ (as will be shown below), while the *Han Shu*, incorporating later information, notes that although the Yuezhi were *originally* a nation of nomads, they had subsequently adopted a more urbanised and sedentary lifestyle (a not-uncommon pattern for nomadic invaders in this region).¹⁷⁶ Obviously the *Shi Ji* is describing the situation within the first two years of the Yuezhi's arrival in northern Bactria, while the *Han Shu* is describing their lifeway some decades later. However the *Han Shu* (in 96B at least) must still be describing the 'state' of the Yuezhi pre-c. 80 BCE (i.e. before the invasion and occupation of Bactria proper) because the 'seat of (the king's) government' is specifically named as Jianshi.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Abdullaev (1995) *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5, see also P. Bernard, 'La campagne de fouilles de 1970 à Ai Khanoum (Afghanistan)', *CRAI* (1971) pp. 433-435, fig. 25 on the gypsum figurine.

¹⁷⁶ Abdullaev *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁷⁷ SI 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁷⁸ HS 96A 14B.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

Population and Military Strength

Households: 100,000 Individuals: 400,000¹⁷⁸

Persons able to bear arms: 100,000

(Zurcher translates this as: '100,000 excellent soldiers').¹⁷⁹

'It is not subject to the Protector General'.¹⁸⁰

'They have some 100,000 - 200,000 archer warriors'.¹⁸¹

These statistics are very close to the figures given for the Yuezhi during their residency in the Gansu - 100,000 trained bowmen¹⁸² and 100,000 - 200,000 archer warriors¹⁸³. Whilst the numbers should not be taken too literally, they do perhaps suggest that despite several divisions within the confederacy (both in the Gansu and the Ili) and a lengthy migration, the Yuezhi dynasty had been essentially able to retain its formidable fighting strength, which is precisely why they appear to have been little troubled in dispatching the Sakas from northern Bactria immediately following their arrival in the region. Both the general population and the numbers in the Yuezhi 'military' would quite possibly have been bolstered by their absorption of other groups en route, including perhaps members of the defeated Sakas. This, too, is a common pattern in the region, and makes particular sense if one thinks of the defeated Sakas not as a 'nation', but as a group which simply accepted a new ruler when the old one was defeated.

Lifeway

The *Shi Ji*, in its account of Zhang Qian's report (which describes the situation between c. 129 and 127) defines the Yuezhi thus:

'They are a nation of nomads, moving from place to place with their herds, and their customs are like those of the Xiongnu'.¹⁸⁴

The *Han Shu*, however, in its description of the northern Bactria 'State' of the Da Yuezhi up to half a century later, describes a lifeway in transition:

'Da Yuezhi was *originally* a land of nomads. The people moved around in company with their stock animals and followed the same way of life as the Xiongnu'.¹⁸⁵

'The land, climate, types of goods, popular way of life and coinage are identical with those of Anxi (Arsacid Parthia)'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁷⁹ Zurcher (1968) *op. cit.* p. 364.

¹⁸⁰ HS 96A 14B

¹⁸¹ SJ 123, Watson p. 234

¹⁸² HS 96A 14B

¹⁸³ SJ 123, Watson p. 234.

¹⁸⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 234

¹⁸⁵ HS 96A 15A.

¹⁸⁶ HS 96A 14B

As has been argued in Chapters One and Two, even during their long residency in the Qansu, the broad Yuezhi-Tocharian confederation had contained both nomadic pastoralist tribes and semi-sedentised agricultural peoples. This duality of lifeway clearly continued in the Ili Basin (an environment ideally suited to both nomadic and agriculture) during three decades of occupation, and it is thus hardly surprising to find a degree of ambiguity in the textual descriptions of the Yuezhi lifeway in northern Bactria also. The 'Greater' Yuezhi were not a homogenous 'people' but a loose confederation of tribes who swore allegiance to the Yuezhi dynasty and its king or queen. Thus in the first few years following their arrival in northern Bactria elements of the confederation clearly continued to nomadise, while the ruling dynasty probably began to think of itself once again as a semi-sedentised group whose members were none the less anxious not to abandon links with their ancestral pastoralist lifeways.

One of the very durable patterns in this region is of pastoral nomadic conquerors whose elites may retain their traditional lifeways for a generation or two, but who then become caught up in the sedentary world, start living in cities and palaces, whilst still retaining their symbolic links with pastoralism. Even Qublai Khan would do this, as would the Khazars and eventually the Mughals. It would therefore not be surprising to find references to, and symbols of, nomadic pastoralism amongst the Yuezhi elite, even once they had long abandoned pastoralism as a way of life. This scenario would be particularly true if some sections of the confederation did indeed continue as pastoralists. Archaeological evidence of the careful treatment of croplands in northern Bactria reinforces the conclusion that substantial numbers of the Yuezhi were clearly planning to settle into a sedentary, agricultural lifeway. On the other hand, the presence of unmolested crop-lands is not necessarily proof of sedentisation; rather it might also indicate an intelligent decision on the part of the dynasty to exact modest tributes from pre-existing farming populations.

Yuezhi Tombs in Northern Bactria?

A.M. Mandleshtam is largely responsible for the discovery and initial interpretation of the nomadic cemeteries of northern Bactria. He dated most of them to between the latter third of the second century BCE and the first century CE, identifying their occupants as members of different pastoral nomadic tribes responsible for the conquest of Greco-Bactria.¹⁸⁷ Mandleshtam's conclusions were later questioned by Litvinski and Sekov, who dated the cemeteries to between the first and fourth centuries CE and somewhat improbably did not associate them with any migrating nomadic tribes, despite the obvious similarities between the tomb-structures of northern Bactria and other nomadic burials at a range of sites between the Ili Valley and Sogdia.¹⁸⁸ Initially (in the 1960s and 70s) three large funerary complexes were uncovered in northern Bactria – at Tulkhar, Aruktau and Kok-kum. The Tulkhar site is the most important and has yielded a significant inventory of grave goods (pottery, buckles, mirrors; see below). Numismatic evidence, namely obols imitating the issues of Eueratides, helped date the Tulkhar tombs to the precise period of probable Yuezhi

¹⁸⁷ See for example Mandleshtam, 'Prirokhozhdenie i rannaya istoriya kushan v svete arkeologicheskikh daniykh', in *Central Asia in the Kushan Period* vol. I (1974) (op. cit.).

¹⁸⁸ See V.A. Litvinsky and A.V. Sekov, *Kulty i ritualy kushanskoi Baktrii* (Cults and Rituals in Bactria in the Kushan Period) (Moscow 1984) pp. 173-5.

occupation of the region, i.e. to the late second and early first centuries B.C. Similar materials were found at the other two sites. This dating allowed Mandleshtam to

state with certainty that they belonged to the nomads, who in the last third of the 2nd century B.C. destroyed the Greco-Bactrian Empire. The migration of the nomads was apparently linked with a considerable migration of tribes in the steppe.¹⁸⁹

The most common nomadic tomb type discovered in northern Bactria is the Type A podboy (with the chamber aligned east-west). No catacomb-type structures or ground-level burials have been unearthed in the region. The podboys have yielded a range of artifacts similar to those discovered in other tentatively-attributed Yuezhi tombs in Ferghana and Sogdia (discussed in the previous chapter).¹⁹⁰ Pottery vessels, mainly jugs and goblets, were almost all fashioned on a potter's wheel (as were most of those discovered in Ferghana). Weapons common to both Bactrian and Sogdian sites include swords and daggers with cross-hilts and fillials, and arrowheads with barbed triangular flanges. As noted above, the arrowheads potentially provide evidence of the nomadic capture of pre-existing Greco-Bactrian fortresses and citadels by both the Sakas and the Yuezhi. Household objects discovered in the tombs include knives, mirrors, jewelry and belt-buckles. According to Gorbunova, there is a marked similarity between belt-buckles discovered in northern Bactria and the Zeravshan Valley in Sogdia:

'Belt buckles from Bactrian and early Sogdian cemeteries are obviously of the same kind, and differ from the buckles from other places. Bactrian and early Sogdian cemeteries (have yielded) distinct types of pottery, weapons, belt-buckles and women's ornaments'.¹⁹¹

That is, if the tombs of the Zeravshan can be tentatively identified as Yuezhi, then so too must the tombs of northern Bactria. But Gorbunova disagrees, arguing that the tombs of Bactria (and also of early Sogdia) should be associated with the Sarmatians, rather than the Yuezhi.

'The repertory of grave-goods in North Bactrian cemeteries documents distinct cultural links with Sarmatian tribes and not with Central Asian ones, which would be natural if the Yuezhi were the area's inhabitants'.¹⁹²

As noted several times already, Mandleshtam and Zadneprovsky have consistently opposed this Sarmatian link, the latter arguing adamantly that 'such burials in podboys of Semirechie, Fergana and Bukhara oases were similar to the Tulkhur group in northern Bactria and belonged to the Yuezhi'.¹⁹³

This question of the specific attribution of nomad tombs aside, Soviet and Russian archaeologists have reached general conclusions on the broader archaeological

¹⁸⁹ A.M. Mandleshtam, 'Archaeological Data on the Origins and Early History of the Kushans', in *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (op. cit.), p. 166.

¹⁹⁰ For a summary see Gorbunova (1992) *op. cit.*, pp. 36-42.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹³ See Zadneprovsky (1970) *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9; see also Y.A. Zadneprovsky, 'Problems of Sarmatian History and Culture', paper delivered at the International Conference held in Volgograd in 1994, and Zadneprovsky (April 1999) *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6.

implications of the distribution and placement of the burial mounds. Most of the tombs seem to have been found somewhat outside or peripheral to the cultivated fields, general some distance from agricultural bases, but in regions close to some of the important river crossings. Bongard-Levin and Stavisky interpret the fact that

The logical conclusion, therefore, is that the nomad newcomers, by their coming, undermine the economy of the local peasants. On the other hand, attempting to leave the fields the damage that would have inevitably incurred by the nomads' presence in the proximity of large masses of animals and their herds. The nomads' burial mounds near the Amu Darya ... leads one to assume that large groups of nomads are aligned in such a way as to be within easy reach of these strategic river crossings. They appear not as transitory strangers, plunderers of agricultural bases, but rather as tribes that came to stay for good on the irrigated lands. (My italics).¹⁹⁵

This surely is a reasonable description of the intentions of the Yuezhi confederation upon their arrival in northern Bactria. After the disruption and uncertainty of continuous migration, they had arrived in a fertile region ideally suited to irrigation agriculture and animal husbandry, and here they intended to stay. These were not transitory, destructive, migratory invaders, but a large confederation of semi-sedentised pastoralists and agriculturists intent upon occupying, controlling and facilitating the continuing prosperity of the Surkhan Darya region. Hence they were careful of the crop lands, established themselves near to the strategic river crossings, and occupied at least one (and probably several) of the pre-existing fortified settlements as a base from which to complete their subjugation both of the northern Bactrian region, and *de facto* of the former Greco-Bactrian realm south of the Amu Darya. And, as suggested above, the ruling Yuezhi dynasty itself would have seen another advantage in leaving pre-existing crop lands unmolested – they knew how to exploit them by taking modest tributes so as not to undermine the wealth of rural populations.

V

The Mission of Zhang Qian: Stage Five

128/7 BCE: *Zhang Qian Visits Bactria*

As shown above, Zhang Qian attempted unsuccessfully to convince the Yuezhi ruler to return to the Gansu and form an alliance with the Han against the Xiongnu. When the Yuezhi showed no interest whatsoever in returning, Zhang Qian decided to remain in the region for 'over a year'¹⁹⁵ and accumulate as much information about Bactria and other contiguous areas as possible. Upon his return to Xian he was thus able to provide Wudi with an extensive report about a number of states and regions of Central Asia, including Bactria, Anxi (Parthia) to the west, and Shendu (northern India, Gandhara, the Indus valley?)¹⁹⁶ to the south. As the Yuezhi had already established a loose hegemony over (and would later occupy) Bactria, Zhang Qian's account of that

¹⁹⁵ Cf. M. Bongard-Levin and B.Y. Stavisky, 'Central Asia in the Kushan Period' in *Kushan Studies in Honour of B. Salomon*, p. 42.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Hulsewe and Loewe *op. cit.*, p. 97 n. 154 for a discussion of the description of Shendu as northern India.

region early in the third decade of the second century BCE is of considerable interest in the context of the subsequent history of the Yuezhi and early-Kushans.

The 'State' of Daxia (Bactria)

Location

We know that Daxia is located 12,000 *li* southwest of China'.¹⁹⁷

Daxia is situated over 2000 *li* southwest of Dayuan, south of the Gao (Amu Darya) River'.¹⁹⁸

the kingdom of Shendu is situated several thousand *li* southeast of Daxia'.¹⁹⁹

According to my reckoning (*Ban Gu* wrote) Daxia lies 12,000 *li* away from Han in the south west, we now find that Shendu lies several thousand *li* to the southeast of Daxia'.²⁰⁰

These references locate Daxia some 5,000 kilometres west of the Han, 800 kilometres southwest of Ferghana, south of the Amu Darya and northwest of northern 'India'. The literature on the identification and derivation of 'Daxia' is long and contradictory. Minns initially considered it to denote the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks),²⁰¹ but this was refuted by both Tarn²⁰² and Narain.²⁰³ Marquart, Chavannes and Konow all believed 'Daxia' to be the phonetic equivalent of 'Tocharian' (and did not believe the Tocharians to be the Yuezhi), but this was refuted by Karlgren, as Tarn pointed out.²⁰⁴ Franke attempted to show that the name Daxia had appeared in Chinese texts long before the report of Zhang Qian.²⁰⁵ Haloun thought that the name originally referred to a mythical people, and thus by the second century BCE 'Daxia' had become for the Chinese a fabled people on the western edge of the known world.²⁰⁶ Tarn dismissed Haloun's explanation,²⁰⁷ although Narain still found some merit in it.²⁰⁸ Given the specific locational, political and lifeway references contained in both the *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu* (and a host of complementary references in western classical literature), however, there can be no possible doubt that Daxia can only be identified as Bactria south of the Amu Darya.

¹⁹⁷ SJ 123, Watson p. 236.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

²⁰⁰ HS 61.3A.

²⁰¹ L. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks* (Cambridge 1913) p. 129.

²⁰² Tarn *op. cit.*, pp. 297-298.

²⁰³ Narain (1957-1980) *op. cit.*, p. 131.

²⁰⁴ P. Marquart, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Iran* (Leipzig 1905) vol. 2, pp. 204-210; Chavannes (1907) *op. cit.*, p. 187; S. Konow, *Kharoshthi Inscriptions*, vol. 2, pt. 1 of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Calcutta 1929) liv-liv; see Tarn *op. cit.* p. 296 n. 2, and *Asiatica IX* (1933) p. 463.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Franke, 'Beiträge aus chinesischen Quellen zur Kenntniss der Türkvolker und Skythen Zentralasiens', *Abhandlungen d. Preuss. Akademie zu Berlin No. 1* (Berlin 1904) pp. 33-40.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Haloun, *Seit wann kannten die Chinesen die Tocharen oder Indo-germanen überhaupt* (1926)

(1928) 202.

²⁰⁷ Tarn *op. cit.* p. 295.

²⁰⁸ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 53, n. 2.

Population Size

'The population of the country is large, numbering some 1,000,000 or more persons'.²¹⁰

'Daxia is a large state'.²¹¹

As with all neatly rounded-off statistics, the figure of one million should not be taken literally, although clearly Bactria south of the Amu Darya contained a very substantial population indeed, as would be expected in the 'land of a thousand cities'.

Military Strength / Urbanisation / Government

'The people (Zurcher suggests 'the troops')²¹² are poor in the use of arms and afraid of battle'. . . After the Great Yuezhi moved west and attacked and conquered Daxia, the entire country came under their sway'.²¹³

'The Yuezhi . . . (proceeded) west to attack and subjugate Daxia . . . The inhabitants are weak and afraid of fighting with the result that when the Yueh-chih migrated there they made them all into their subjects'.²¹⁴

'They (the inhabitants of Daxia) provide supplies for Han envoys'.²¹⁵

'Its people . . . have cities and houses. It has no great ruler but only a number of petty chiefs ruling the various cities'. . . The capital is called the city of Lanshi (Bactra).²¹⁶

'Originally Ta Hsia had no major overlord or chief, and minor chiefs were frequently established in the towns'.²¹⁷

As suggested above, this does not sound like a description of the powerful Greco-Bactrian kingdom of Euthydemus and Eucratides. The fact that the people are described as 'poor in the use of arms and afraid of battle', or 'weak and afraid of fighting' is additional evidence of the political and military disintegration of the country following the death of Eucratides in c. 145 (as possibly indicated in the archaeological and numismatic record of Ai Khanoum). Within a decade or so following the death of Eucratides, strong and centralised Greek authority in Bactria had virtually ceased to exist (even though Heliocles and other later kings may have continued to rule in isolated regions of Bactria until early in the following century). In the absence of any central authority and the breakdown of the military, the residents of Bactria were left more or less defenceless in the face of Saka aggression. This suggests that most of the population of Bactria were probably farmers, whom pastoralists might despise for their military weakness. The inference that the majority of Bactrians were probably agriculturists is strengthened by a reference in the *Han*

²¹⁰ SJ 123, Watson p. 235.

²¹¹ HS 61.3A.

²¹² Zurcher *op. cit.*, p. 361.

²¹³ SJ 123, Watson p. 235.

²¹⁴ HS 96A.15A.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ SJ 123, Watson p. 235.

²¹⁷ HS 96A.15A.

Shu. In discussing the 'state' of Shendu with武帝 Zhang Qian says: 'Its way of life (i.e. *Shendu*) is one of attachment to the land, as it is in *Daxia* (My nation)'.

This would help explain the apparent ease and swiftness of the conquest of Bactria by both the Sakas and Yuezhi. In the case of the former, once the bulk of ~~their force~~ had been defeated (perhaps at Ai Khanoum?) the Sakas would have met little opposition in forcing their will upon the rest of the population. And once the Yuezhi arrived and defeated the Sakas, gaining hegemony over the million or so Bactrians would have been relatively easy. However, the destruction of Ai Khanoum – and perhaps, the evidence of Zhang Qian indicates that although the nomads might have 'conquered' the region, the urban infrastructure was still largely intact, and in particular that extensive mercantile activity was flourishing.

Environment/Lifestyles

'His people cultivate the land and have cities and houses. Their customs are like those of *Dayuan*. . . the people are clever at commerce. . . The capital (*Bactra*) has a market where all sorts of goods are bought and sold'.²¹⁸

the men of *Daxia* said: "Our merchants go and buy them in the state of *Shendu*".²¹⁹

Despite the fact that 'the entire country' of Bactria was now 'under their (the Yuezhi's) sway' (or 'completely subdued and tamed', as Zurcher translates the same passage),²²⁰ and that all of the inhabitants were now 'their subjects', Bactria clearly still maintained a degree of internal political independence in that its various cities were ruled by 'petty' or 'minor' chiefs.²²¹ Furthermore the Bactrians still had their own capital city of *Lan-shi* (the massive walled and defensible city of *Bactra*) where commerce was being carried out, presumably in an orderly and profitable way, and was not severely affected by brigandage. The bulk of the trade was being conducted with *Shendu*, and the goods involved included cloth and cane products from provinces in China, as Zhang Qian observed:

'When I was in *Daxia*. . . I saw bamboo canes from *Qiong* and cloth made in the province of *Shu*'.²²² When I asked the people how they had gotten such articles they replied, "Our merchants go to buy them in the markets of *Shendu*".²²³

The sources thus show unequivocally that Chinese goods were being imported through India into Central Asia well before the traditionally accepted date for the commencement of Silk Roads trade (i.e. c. late-first century BCE). As was noted earlier in this book, world historians have long maintained that the so-called 'Silk Roads' were instrumental in uniting the Eurasian continent into a single world system.

²¹⁷ HS 61.3A.

²¹⁸ SJ 123, Watson p. 235.

²¹⁹ HS 61.3A.

²²⁰ Zurcher, in Bushnell ed. (1968), p. 361.

²²¹ Narain goes too far in suggesting that Bactria 'was still an independent state south of the Oxus and could be negotiated with'. Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 38. The references overwhelmingly describe the Bactrians as Yuezhi subjects, and the Bactrian 'state' as being under Yuezhi control.

²²² Both *Qiong* and *Shu* were in Western Sichuan Province. For the former see Y. Hervouet *Un porte de commerce sous les Han, Szeu-ma Siang-nou* (Paris 1964) pp. 36 and 113 ff. For *Shu* see Loewe (1967) *op. cit.* pp. 180-181.

²²³ SJ 123, Watson pp. 235-6.

from at least the second millennium BC (David Christian, for example, argues that

by 2000 BCE the caravans of camel and pack animals were carrying goods from the Tarim Basin to the Ganges valley, and from the Ganges valley to the Indus valley, and from the Indus valley to the Persian Gulf.^{22a}

The cane and cloth products manufactured in central China were obviously being transported a considerable distance, initially along routes well beyond the Tarim Eurasian steppes. From Chengdu in Sichuan the only viable route would have been south into Yunnan Province, then either west and north through Bactria (Maushaka) or west along the Brahmaputra, to the Ganges.^{22b} Ancient trade and communicating routes through the Ganges Basin would have eventually fed into the equally well-travelled paths of the Indus Valley. There had probably been extensive trade contact between Bactria and northern India for centuries if not millennia, presumably across the Khyber Pass and through Taxila and the Punjab. This same route would later be used by Kujula Kadphises and Vima Takto to conquer Shendu and eventually incorporate much of northern and central India into the Kushan Empire. It would subsequently become a principal southern branch route of the 'Silk Roads' during the Kushan Era.

The towns of Bactria, particularly Bactra itself, thus apparently remained semi-independent, self-governing and no doubt reasonably wealthy entities, paying tribute to the Yuezhi as they had done to the Sakas during the preceding decade, as shown by the continued circulation of Attic standard coinage. Bactra was therefore probably not sacked either by the Sakas or the Yuezhi and was functioning as a large and successful market town during Zhang Qian's visit. It would not be until perhaps fifty years later that the Yuezhi would move into Bactria en masse, redefining that state as the heartland of the embryonic Kushan Empire, with Bactra probably its first capital. Certainly by the early second century CE the *Hou Han Shu* would specifically name Lanshi/Bactra as the capital of the Yuezhi.^{22c}

126/125 BCE: The Return of Zhang Qian

After his year-long exploratory sojourn in Bactria, Zhang Qian probably made one last unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Yuezhi to join an alliance with the Han before commencing his return journey to China via the southern Tarim Basin route. He was once again captured by the Xiongnu, but after being detained for up to a year was able to escape during the chaos that followed the death of the *Shanyu* Junchen in 126, and the controversial and contested succession by the Luli King of the Left that ensued. Junchen's preferred heir, Yudan (presumably the more senior Wise King of

^{22a} Christian, 'Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History' (2000) *op. cit.* pp. 81-82. See also A.G. Frank and B.K. Gills, eds., *The World System: From Five Hundred Years to Five Thousand Years* (London and New York 1992) p. 84; and Frank and Brownstone (1986) *op. cit.* pp. 44-45.

^{22b} Zhang Qian also hinted at the viability of this route to Bactria, which avoided the dangers of both the Qiang and Xiongnu 'barbarians', in HS 61.3A. However, when he was sent in 124 BCE by Wudi to personally lead an expedition into the region in an attempt to find a southern route through to Shendu and Daxin, the party was attacked by the Kunming barbarians and many envoys were murdered, below, and SJ 123, Watson pp. 236-71.

^{22c} HHS 118.2a.

the Left), was passed over for some unexplained reason and forced to flee to the Han for protection. He was enticed by Wudi, but died of unspecified causes several months later.²²² Sima Qian had no doubt that this controversial succession allowed Zhang Qian to escape from the Xiongnu for a second time:

in the end he was never able to interest the Yuezhi in his proposals. After spending a year or so in the area, he began to journey back along the Nan-shan (the Southern Mountains), intending to re-enter China through the territory of the Qiang barbarians, but he was once more recaptured by the Xiongnu and detained for over a year. Just at this time (126) the *Shanyu* died and the Luli King of the Left attacked the *Shanyu*’s heir and set himself up as the new *Shanyu*. As a result of this the whole Xiongnu nation was in turmoil and Zhang Qian, along with his Xiongnu wife and the former slave Ganfu, was able to escape and return to China.²²³

Zhang Qian clearly had a ‘window of opportunity’ to escape his Xiongnu captors in the very early spring of 125, and as it would probably have taken only a matter of weeks to complete the journey to Xian, he must have arrived there by the summer of 125 at the latest.²²⁴ Haloun also dated Zhang Qian’s return to 126 or 125,²²⁵ as did Daffina.²²⁶ Upon his return to the court Zhang Qian was appointed to be ‘supreme counsellor of the palace’ by Wudi, and then prepared an extensive report on his extraordinary journey. The ambassador’s account beguiled the emperor, stoking his already ambitious nature by assuring him of the potential for Han expansion into Central Asia. As Sima Qian puts it:

‘All these states (Wudi was told) were militarily weak and prized Han goods and wealth. He also learned that to the north of them lived the Yuezhi and Kangju people who were strong in arms but who could be persuaded by gifts and the prospect of gain to acknowledge allegiance to the Han Court. If it were only possible to win over these states by peaceful means, he could then extend his domain 10,000 *li*... and his might would become known to all the lands within the four seas’.²²⁷

Here we see clearly articulated the link between imperial glory and the potential for commercial gain, surely the twin motivations for most imperial expansions in history. Zhang Qian was able to use this promise to urge Wudi to follow up this initial exploratory journey with a series of subsequent missions deep into Central Asia.

Han Missions to Bactria and the West after 126 BCE

In his report, Zhang Qian had noted that Bactria provided ‘supplies for Han envoys’, a reference that applied not only to the hospitality afforded to his own small party in 128, but which would also describe the experiences of subsequent Chinese missions to the west after 126 BCE. In the years immediately following his return the envoy was given the responsibility of organising several follow-up diplomatic missions, some to states he had already visited on his first epic journey, and others to entirely new destinations.

²²² SJ 110, Watson pp. 150-1.

²²³ SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

²²⁴ An argument with which Torday agrees, *op. cit.* p. 106.

²²⁵ Haloun (1937) *op. cit.* p. 294, n. 5.

²²⁶ P. Daffina, ‘La migrazione dei Wu-sun’, in *Rivista degli studi orientali* 44 (Roma 1969) p. 144, n. 2.

²²⁷ SJ 123, Watson p. 236.

The first of these undertaken probably in 124) was an attempt to find a way through to Daxia following the southern route from Sichuan Province that Zhang Qian had presumed the Chinese trade goods being sold in the markets of Bactria had followed. This would theoretically open up a new route to Bactria that would circumvent the Xiongnu and the Qiang people, who both posed a considerable threat to the northern route. The secret mission travelled to Shu province in the south and then broke into four groups which each attempted to find a way through. After travelling between 1,000 and 2,000 *li* however, Sima Qian describes how their passage was blocked by the murderous Kunming tribes:

‘The Kunming tribes have no rulers but devote themselves to plunder and robbery, and as soon as they seized any of the Han envoys they immediately murdered them. Thus none of the parties was ever able to get through to their destination’.²³²

The following year (probably 123) Zhang Qian was made a subordinate military commander, and was sent as special envoy and guide with general-in-chief Wei Qing on an expedition against the Xiongnu. Zhang Qian's knowledge of the geography of the Gansu and regions to the north proved crucial: ‘Because he knew where water and pasture were to be found in Xiongnu territory, he was able to save the army from hardship’.²³³ As a reward for his contribution to a successful campaign, he was enfeoffed by Wudi as the Bowang or ‘Broad Vision’ Marquis. The marquis was despatched again the next year (122) as colonel of the guard in another military expedition against the Xiongnu, led by General Li Guang. However, this time the Xiongnu were able to ambush and destroy most of the Han army, and Zhang Qian was accused of having arrived late at a crucial rendezvous with Li Guang. In the recriminations that followed the Bowang Marquis and colonel of the guard was sentenced to execution, but after paying a fine was reduced to the rank of commoner instead.²³⁴

By the following year (121) his reputation had been restored, largely because the emperor found he could not do without the advice and experience of Zhang Qian on Central Asian matters. In particular, the envoy was able to supply detailed information about the history of the Wusun. Zhang Qian proposed a mission to the Wusun *Kunmo*, arguing that if the Han could establish ‘an alliance with the Wusun, Daxia and the other countries to the west could all be persuaded to come to court and acknowledge themselves as foreign vassals’.²³⁵ The emperor agreed and, appointing Zhang Qian as a general of palace attendants, put him in charge of a party of 300 men, 600 horses, tens of thousands of cattle and sheep and a substantial treasury of cash, silk and gold. At the same time, other officials in the expedition were given imperial credentials so that ‘they could be sent to neighbouring states along the way’.²³⁶ Zhang Qian immediately found himself in the midst of a difficult political climate amongst the Wusun, who were not only less than impressed by the reputation of Han, but were also split into several factions. The *Kunmo* had ten sons, and the question of succession was dominating Wusun politics, which meant that no one would make a

²³² SJ 123, Watson pp. 236-37

²³³ SJ 123, Watson p. 237

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 238

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

decision concerning a possible alliance with the Chinese. While Zhang Qian waited for the situation to be resolved (and with the help of Wusun guides) he despatched his deputies on missions back to Dayuan, Kangju and Daxia and several other states of Central Asia.²³⁷

In 120, with his deputies still away in the west, Zhang Qian returned to the Han Court with some twenty or thirty Wusun envoys. They were so impressed with 'the breadth and greatness of the Han Empire' that this greatly facilitated the stabilization of relations between the Wusun and Han.²³⁹ A grateful Wudi honoured Zhang Qian by appointing him to the post of Grand Messenger, thus 'ranking him among the nine highest ministers of the government'.²⁴⁰ A year or so later (119 or 118) the great envoy was dead. During the course of those same two years the deputies despatched further west also returned to China, accompanied by envoys from several Central Asian states, which consolidated Han relations with the western states first visited by Zhang Qian a decade or so earlier. Over the course of the following decade (i.e. c. 118

108 BCE) the Han gradually extended their fortifications and their imperial domains further and further to the west, establishing 'provinces' deeper into southern China at locations such as Zangge, Yuesui, Yizhou, Shenli and Wenshan. They also despatched new envoys (Bo Shichang, Lu Yueren, Generals Guo Chang and Wei Guang) to lead further missions in an attempt to discover a southern route through to Bactria, but again these were forestalled by the Kunming barbarians.²⁴¹

At the same time the Han continued to strengthen and make safer the northern route through the Gansu and Tarim Basin to Bactria. They established the province of Jiuguang 'in order to provide a safe route to the lands of the north west',²⁴² and began despatching more and more missions to Parthia, India and even Mesopotamia (if the sources are to be believed).²⁴³ These missions were substantial in size and duration (the largest comprising up to several hundred members, the smallest at least 100) and they were often so frequent that the 'envoys were in sight of each other on the roads'.²⁴⁴ Despite their apparent regularity and size, the journey was far from easy or rapid, and while those travelling to closer Central Asian states would return in a few years, 'those travelling to distant lands required eight or nine years to complete their journey'.²⁴⁵ The missions were led and staffed by various officials and soldiers who had served with Zhang Qian on one of his journeys, but also by volunteers whose quality and honesty was somewhat suspect.

As a result of the corrupt behaviour of many of these 'worthless men' (as Sima Qian called them),²⁴⁶ 'the men of foreign lands soon became disgusted (and) refused to supply the envoys with food and provisions'.²⁴⁷ However, Bactria apparently continued to be willing to provide supplies for large parties, which no doubt stayed

²³⁷ SJ 123, Watson pp. 238 ff.

²³⁸ SJ 123, Watson p. 240, HS 61.5B.

²³⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 240.

²⁴⁰ SJ 123, p. 241.

²⁴¹ SJ 123, Watson p. 240.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ HS 61.6A.

²⁴⁴ SJ 123, Watson p. 241.

²⁴⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 242.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

for a reasonable length of time in the region. Further evidence of the continuing wealth of Bactria even after Sakan and then Yuezhi subjugation. This was clearly a wealth founded on flourishing mercantile activity, with Bactria a great entrepot for increasing trade between China, Parthia, India and eventually the Mediterranean world. It was apparent the success of the merchant community of Bactria, and the strategic positioning of that state at the centre of significant trade routes at the 'Crossroad of Asia', that would ultimately provide both the means and the inspiration for the Kushans to establish their own wealthy and flourishing empire, based similarly on the regulation of lucrative trans-Eurasian trade.

Significance of the Missions of Zhang Qian

Zhang Qian did not live to see the full flowering and ultimate success of his attempts to establish closer relations between Han China and the various states of Central Asia. After the great envoy's death in 119 or 118, he was buried in Jang Jia Izun near Qenggo in Shensi Province.²⁴⁸ Both Sima Qian and Ban Gu are justifiably complimentary in their assessment of the achievements of the ambassador who led the first and most significant Chinese mission to the west:

Zhang Qian was a man of great strength, determination and generosity. He trusted others and in turn was liked by the barbarians. When Zhang Qian first set out on his mission, he was accompanied by over one hundred men, but after thirteen years abroad only he and Ganfu managed to make their way back to China.²⁴⁹

Qian was a man of strong physique and of considerable generosity; he inspired the trust of others and the barbarians loved him.²⁵⁰

The Han historians were also in no doubt where the credit for China's subsequent active commercial, political and military engagement with Central Asia lay. As Sima Qian noted,

It was Zhang Qian ... who opened the way for this move, and all the envoys who journeyed to the lands in later times relied upon his reputation to gain them a hearing. As a result of his efforts, the foreign states trusted the Han envoys.²⁵¹

Zhang Qian's first expedition was thus not only a classic tale of Central Asian adventure, but an expedition of far-reaching historical significance. Of course chance or fate also played a major role in all this. There is, for example, no way of knowing how differently subsequent events might have turned out had the envoy avoided captivity by the Xiongnu and managed to meet with the Yuezhi in the Hsi in 139 or 138. If he had, he may well have enticed them (with promises of Han military and financial support) to return and confront the Xiongnu, in which case there would have been no need for either the Yuezhi or Zhang Qian to continue their journeys to Bactria. The Han envoy would probably therefore never have visited Ferghana, Sogdia or Bactria, nor heard of Parthia and India, and the Chinese court may have remained ignorant of the world beyond their western borders, and of the trade and strategic opportunities it afforded, for decades if not longer. The fact that Zhang Qian

²⁴⁸ SJ 123, p. 240.

²⁴⁹ SJ 123, Watson p. 233.

²⁵⁰ HS 61.2B.

²⁵¹ SJ 123, Watson p. 240.

was able to beguile Wudi with the possibilities for mercantile and imperial expansion to the west was responsible for enticing China out of millennia of relative isolation, and into active engagement with the rest of Central Asia and ultimately (although indirectly) with the Greco-Roman world.

In addition, if the Yuezhi had joined with the Han and travelled no further west than the Ili, there would surely have been no Kushan Empire, and the extraordinary levels of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange which occurred along the Silk Roads during the 'Kushan Era', due at least as much to the tolerant, mercantile attitude of the Kushan kings as it was to the demand for luxury goods in Rome, and the desire of Han merchants to meet that demand, might have been significantly diminished. Such is the degree to which world history, despite being largely subject to inevitable forces and processes of cultural evolution often beyond the influence of mere individuals, does on occasion still seem to hinge upon a series of chance decisions, coincidences and personal endeavours.

VI

Conclusion: The Yuezhi Conquest of Northern Bactria

A range of evidence allows for a possible reconstruction of the most likely course of events in the final stage of the extraordinary migration of the Yuezhi confederation. The Chinese sources suggest that upon their arrival north of the Oxus in 130 BCE, the 100,000 to 200,000 Yuezhi archer warriors quickly defeated and evicted another resident group of Sai or Sakas, similar to the Iranian-speaking people they had already displaced from the Ili Valley (and also perhaps from parts of Ferghana). A decade or so earlier the Sakas may have affected their own conquest of the disintegrating Greek kingdom of Bactria, as numismatic and archaeological evidence from Ai Khanoum seems to indicate. The Sakas had posed a considerable threat to both the Parthians and Bactrians since late in the third century BCE, as the statement made by Euthydemus' envoy to Antiochus III during the two-year siege of Bactra shows.²⁵² These events are further confirmed by several references in the classical sources, and by the fragmentary wall paintings of Khalehayan and Dalverzin Tepe. In addition, Ptolemy (who had unwittingly traced the entire Yuezhi migration), provides confirmation of the eventual occupation of the former Greco-Bactrian state by the Yuezhi in noting one final group of Tocharians (this time called the *Tocharoi*) living in Bactria.²⁵³

The displaced Sakas were forced south of the Hindu Kush where they were eventually resettled in Sacastan (present-day Sistan) by (probably) Mithridates II sometime after 123 BCE. Some decades later, perhaps at about the same time the Yuezhi also crossed the Amu Darya en masse and occupied Bactria (c. 80 BCE?), the Sakas were consequently pushed further south again, ultimately allowing for Maues to be installed as the first Indo-Scythian ruler of Taxila. These are events that must be explored elsewhere, however. Two distinct groups of 'nomads' were thus responsible for the defeat and subjugation of the remnant Greco-Bactrian realm – the Sakas between c. 145 and 130, and the Yuezhi after 130.

The fighting prowess of the million or so native inhabitants of Bactria is dealt with dismissively by the Chinese texts, but very few sedentary kingdoms (particularly one already fragmenting) would have been able to withstand the subsequent invasion of two powerful nomadic confederations.²⁵⁴ By defeating and evicting the Sakas overlords from northern Bactria the Yuezhi were also able to achieve a relatively bloodless hegemony over Bactria proper. The wall-paintings at Khalkchayan suggest a fierce conflict between the Sakas and Yuezhi in 130, but thereafter there is no evidence of any further necessity for the Yuezhi to inflict their military will upon Bactria south of the Amu Darya by force of arms. Quite probably the mere appearance of a hundred thousand archer-warriors on the northern borders of the country had been sufficient to achieve success. Local rulers would undoubtedly have recognised that the Yuezhi were powerful enough to be worth accepting as symbolic overlords. The Yuezhi 'conquest' of Bactria should thus be viewed as a further example of an often-repeated Inner Asian historical scenario – the conquest of an agrarian society by a militarised pastoralist society. Like the Mongols in the 13th Century, the Yuezhi had clearly remained highly militarised during the three decades of their migration from the Gansu. Such an account allows for the evidence of a (probably quite small) elite dynasty (the Yuezhi, and later the Kueizhuang) ruling a large population of pastoralists and agriculturists, a pattern to be repeated many times in Central Asian history (for example, under the Seljuks).

Once 'conquered' the Bactrians were permitted to retain local rulers for their cities and towns – pastoralists invariably ruled their territories through subordinate chiefs who belonged to the dynasties they had just conquered – and they were also able to continue to conduct their lucrative markets, particularly in the capital of Bactra (called Jianshi in the Chinese sources), by a conquering dynastic elite that clearly recognised the value of trade. This appreciation of the importance of trade would certainly be true of the first Turk Empire of the sixth century, and was undoubtedly so of the Yuezhi who must have witnessed the value of trade first hand along the major routes they had followed through the Ili, Ferghana, Zeravshan and Surkhan Darya Valleys, as well as being personally acquainted with its benefits through their own possible experience as jade and horse traders in the Gansu and Tarim Basin. This experience, along with the example of both the urbanised sedentary existence of the Bactrians, and of their extensive and flourishing mercantile activity, may well have played a major role in influencing the majority of the Yuezhi federation to abandon nomadism and adopt the more settled, 'mercantile' life style hinted at in the *Han Shu*. By the mid-first century of the Common Era (and probably earlier) the Yuezhi-Kushans would also adopt the great trade entrepot of Bactra as their capital.

By 128/7 BCE then, the Yuezhi were well established at 'the seat of the (king's) government' at Jianshi (Khalkchayan?), and in their most comfortable position for decades. Here the dynasty pursued a semi-sedentary lifeway hinted at by the Chinese sources and the archaeological evidence of nomadic tombs in northern Bactria, based partly on exacting tribute from both the agriculturists and merchants of the region. Far from their original enemies, the Xiongnu and Wusun, they had established themselves in a strongly-fortified position in the Surkhan Darya valley, and had subdued the extensive, wealthy and urbanised state of Bactria to the south, where the land was 'rich and fertile and seldom troubled by invaders'.²⁵⁵ They were also

²⁵⁴ HS 96A 15A: SJ 123, Watson p. 235.

²⁵⁵ SJ 123, Watson p. 232.

protected by an important buffer state to the north in Kangju Sogdiana, which already acknowledged 'nominal sovereignty' to the Yuezhi. With the Sakas expelled and the Parthians circumvented or disinterested,²⁵⁶ it is no wonder that the Yuezhi had 'set their minds on [a life of] peace and contentment', and 'being removed afar they wished to keep their distance from the Han, and had no intention at all of taking revenge on the nomads' (Xiongnu).²⁵⁷ As Narain neatly observes:

'Fired of moving from one place to another, they would not be prepared to be displaced again, especially from the fertile valley which they had come to occupy. When Zhang Qian was visiting the Da Yuezhi they were just emerging out of a dangerous decade of instability and they surely needed security and peace. This is why they refused to oblige the Chinese even against their old enemy, the Xiongnu'.²⁵⁸

Drawing a clear distinction between the conquering dynastic Yuezhi elite based north of the Oxus, and the Bactrians to the south, Zhang Qian then journeyed south into Bactria and spent up to a year in the Bactrian capital before returning to the Yuezhi Court at Jiashu, only to have his original assessment of the situation confirmed. Zhang Qian then returned to China in 126/5 (not without further adventure), and despite having been unsuccessful in his mission to secure an alliance with the Yuezhi, he was none the less rewarded by Wudi with 'honour and position' for 'opening up communications with the lands of the west'.²⁵⁹ The Yuezhi were left to consolidate their position north of the Amu Darya, and to exploit the resources of the fertile river valleys of the region, until perhaps 80 BCE when their circumstances changed again.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ See Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 32 for a discussion of possible Yuezhi-Parthian confrontation during the reign of Artabanus II, who Justin says was killed fighting against the 'Tokharai' in 124 (Justin *xxx* 2.1.21). These events unfortunately must remain just outside of the scope of this book, but will be explored in a future study.

²⁵⁷ SJ 123, Watson p. 242.

²⁵⁸ Narain (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁵⁹ SJ 124, Watson p. 241.

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